DIRECT ACTION

An Ethnography

DAVID GRAEBER

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AN ETHNOGRAPHY

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BY DAVID GRAEBER

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Direct Action: An Ethnography
by David Graeber

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PREFACE

DIRECT ACTION, AN ETHNOGRAPHY

A book this size is unusual nowadays. It was certainly not my initial plan. When I first decided to begin writing up some of my experiences of direct action from an ethnographic perspective, I actually had intended to write a fairly short book. But the more I wrote, the more the topic seemed to grow. I realized I was faced with a common dilemma of ethnographic writing: points that seem simple and obvious to anyone who has spent years inside a given cultural universe require a great deal of ink to convey to someone who hasn't. Something similar had happened to me when I returned to Chicago from my dissertation research in Madagascar, many years ago. I remember fretting over just how much I had to say. I felt I had at best two or three really interesting points to make about the community I'd been studying. Then the moment I started writing, I realized that to explain any one of those points to someone who was not themselves from a rural Malagasy community would require several hundred pages. By the time I was done writing, I also realized that most readers would probably find the exposition much more interesting, all in all, than whatever I originally thought was the "point."

Call this book, then, a tribute to the continued relevance of ethnographic writing. By "ethnographic writing," I mean the kind that aims to describe the contours of a social and conceptual universe in a way that is at once theoretically informed, but not, in itself, simply designed to advocate a single argument or theory. There was a time when the detailed description of a political or ceremonial or exchange system in Africa or Amazonia was considered a valuable contribution to human knowledge in itself. This is no longer really the case. An anthropologist actually from Africa or Amazonia, or even some parts of Europe, might still be able to get away with writing such a book. Presently, the academic convention in America (which a young scholar would be unwise to ignore) is that one must pretend one's description is really meant to make some larger point. This seems unfortunate to me. For one thing, I think it limits a book's potential to endure over time. Classic ethnographies, after all, can be reinterpreted. New ones—however fascinating—rarely present enough material to allow this; and what there is tends to be strictly organized around a specific argument or related series of them.

Therefore, let me warn the reader immediately: there is no particular argument to this book—unless it's, that the movement described within is well worth thinking about. This does not mean it does not contain theoretical arguments. Over the course of it, I make any number of them: whether about the ideological role of large heavy objects, the political implications of the word "opinion," the similarity of writing news stories and Homeric epic composition, or the cosmological role of the police in American culture. What makes this an ethnographic work in the classic sense of the term is that, as Franz Boas once put it, the general is in the service of the particular—aside, perhaps, from the final reflections. Theory is invoked largely to aid in the ultimate task of description. Anarchists and direct action campaigns do not exist to allow some academic to make a theoretical point or prove some rival's theory wrong (any more than do Balinese trance rituals or Andean irrigation technologies), and it strikes me as obnoxious to suggest otherwise. I would like to think that, as a result, the interest of this book might also endure not only for those motivated by historical curiosity, who wish to understand what it was actually like to have been in the middle of these events, but to ask the same sort of questions the actors in it were raising, about the nature of democracy, autonomy, and possibilities—or for that matter, dilemmas, limitations—of strategies of transformative political action.

SOME WORDS OF HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Enough time has passed since the breathless days of 2000 and 2001 that one can begin, perhaps, to see that historical moment in a little bit of perspective. That period, it is now clear, marked a certain watershed for global neoliberalism. These were the years in which the "Washington Consensus" of the 1990s was shattered. It happened very quickly. In fact it is a testimony to the effectiveness of direct action that it took only about three years of large-scale popular mobilizations in order to do so.

It is sometimes hard to remember, nowadays, just what the days of the Washington Consensus were like. Perhaps it might be best to start then with a word of context, to help understand why it was that the Zapatista rebellion in 1994 served as such a catalyst for the global movement against neoliberalism that followed, and why that movement came to take the form it did.

The Momentary Suspension of History

The years just before the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas announced itself to the world were probably the most depressing time to be a revolutionary—or even, dedicated to the ideals of the Left—in living memory. It wasn't the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe that was depressing; most radicals were glad to see them go. What was depressing was what happened afterwards. With Stalinism dead, most Marxists expected to see a renaissance of more humane forms of Marxism. Social democrats believed that they had finally won the argument with the revolutionary Left and expected to shepherd the former subjects of the Soviet bloc into their fold; a reasonable expectation, since when polled, most of the population of Central and Eastern Europe said they wanted to model their new economies on Sweden. Instead, they got shock therapy and the most savage form of unrestricted capitalism. In almost every way, the world seemed to be heading for a nightmare scenario. The romantic image of the guerilla insurrectionary, which captured so many imaginations in the 1960s, was cascading into a kind of obscene self-parody. Already in the 1980s, the Right, which had been arguing for years that guerilla insurgencies in places like Vietnam, or Zimbabwe, or El Salvador were not spontaneous but fiendish schemes created by foreign ideologues, began to put their own theories into practice, with the US and South African intelligence agencies creating guerilla armies like the contras or RENAMO to sic on leftist regimes. At the same time, existing Marxist guerilla movements from Columbia to Angola that had begun full of high-minded rhetoric were increasingly prone to become pure bandit kings, or nihilistic armies without any cause beyond their own rebellion (those which held to the old ideal of social transformation, like the Shining Path in Peru, seemed if anything even worse). Liberation movements everywhere were transforming into vicious ethnic wars. Then came the wave of genocide, of which Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia were only the most dramatic and visible.

On a dozen interlocking registers simultaneously, the emerging pattern seemed catastrophic. It seemed like it would go something like this: On an international level, capitalism was transforming itself into a revolutionary force. Abandoning the welfare-state version of capitalism that had actually won the Cold War, the old Cold Warriors and their corporate sponsors were demanding a pure, no-holds-barred, free-market version that had never actually existed, and were willing to wreak havoc on all existing institutional social arrangements in order to achieve it. All this involved a kind of weird inversion. The standard right-wing line, since at least the 1790s, had always been that revolutionary dreams were dangerous precisely because they were utopian: they ignored the real complexity of social life, tradition, authority, and human nature, and dreamed of reshaping the world according to some abstract ideal. By the 1990s, the places had been completely reversed. The Left had largely abandoned utopianism (and the more it did so, the more it shriveled and collapsed), and even as they did so, the Right picked it up. Free-market "reformers" overnight began declaring themselves revolutionaries—the problem was, they did so as the worst sorts of Stalinists, essentially telling the world's poor that science had proved there was only one way to go forward in history, that this was understood by a scientifically trained elite, and that, therefore, they had to shut up and do as they were told because, even though their prescriptions might cause enormous suffering, death, and dislocation in the present, at some point in the future (they were not sure quite when) it would all lead to a paradise of peace and prosperity. The fact that the "science" itself had shifted from historical materialism to free-market economics was a fairly minor detail; anyway, it makes it easier to explain how former Stalinists from Romania to Vietnam found it so easy to simply switch hats and declare themselves neoliberals. Meanwhile, as structural adjustment policies stripped away what small social protections had existed for the poorest inhabitants of the planet, propaganda and statistical manipulation had become so effective that most mainstream Americans who paid attention to such matters were convinced that conditions for the world's poorest were actually improving, and not just in areas like East Asia that had mostly refused to adopt neoliberal policies.

Every progressive victory seemed to have been threatened or reversed. In South Africa, generations of struggle had finally eliminated racial apartheid; a moment of happiness, certainly, but an almost identical system was being created on a global scale, based on increasingly militarized borders, and on a labor migration regime where, for those trapped in poor countries, residence in rich, largely white countries was dependent on possession of identity papers and willingness to work in jobs the residents themselves weren't willing to do. Feminism was being retrenched. Former victories over sweatshop labor, child labor, even chattel slavery, were all being eroded or downright eradicated.

Much of the problem stemmed precisely from the rout of the dream of social revolution, and those utopian fantasies that had always been necessary to inspire people to the passion and self-sacrifice required to actually work to transform the world in the direction of greater freedom and greater equality. I am referring here to genuine, living utopianism—the idea that radical alternatives are possible and that one can begin to create them in the present—as opposed to what might be called "scientific utopianism": the idea that the revolutionary is the agent of the inevitable march of history, which was so easily, and catastrophically, appropriated by the Right. The murder of dreams could only lead to nightmares. It made it almost impossible to form a center from which to fight the incursions of the (now super-charged, revolutionary) Right. Social Democratic parties in Europe, for example, which were born from a reformist strain of Marxism, first seemed rather pleased with the collapse of their revolutionary cousins—they had finally won the argument—until they realized that their own appeal, and the willingness of capitalists to engage with them, was almost entirely based on their ability to position themselves as the less threatening alternative. Before long, the social democratic regimes had experienced such a moral and political collapse that the few still in power were reduced to becoming the agents for the dismantling of the welfare states they had originally created. The activist Left in industrialized countries was becoming increasingly reactionary, capable of mobilizing passions only to defend things that already existed—the ozone layer, affirmative action programs, trees—and increasingly ineffectively. Elsewhere, it seemed in near-total collapse.

Then, finally, there was "globalization."

As Anna Tsing (2002) has recently reminded us, there's a curious history here. The notion really began as a progressive one. It was a stronger version of internationalism: the sense not only that all men are brothers but that we are the common custodians of a single, fragile planet—an idea encapsulated by photographs of the earth taken from outer space by astronauts in the 1960s. The 1990s rhetoric of globalization had none of this. Essentially, it had two legs: one was that telecommunications—and particularly the Internet—were annihilating distance and making instant contact possible between any part of the planet; the other was that the fall of the Iron Curtain and other barriers to trade were, at the same time, creating a single, unified global market, whose financial mechanisms could then operate through these same instantaneous electronic means. Mainly, it was just about the power of finance capital. But the rhetoric was usually accompanied by a series of very broad generalizations: that not only money but products, ideas, and people were "flowing" about as never before, national economies could no longer dream of being autonomous; old nationalist ideologies, indeed, national borders, were becoming increasingly irrelevant, and so on. All of this was presented as happening all of its own accord. Technologies advanced, people were increasingly in contact with one another: the only possible language for them to deal with one another was trade—since capitalism was, after all, rooted in human nature.

For anyone who was really paying attention, of course, the reality was very different. Borders were not being effaced, but reinforced. Poor populations were still penned into their countries of origin (in which existing social benefits were being rapidly withdrawn). "Globalization" merely referred to the ability of finance capital to skip around as it wished and take advantage of that fact. Most of all, however, the period of "globalization"—or neoliberalism, as it came to be known just about everywhere except America—saw the creation of the first genuinely planetary bureaucratic system in human history.

In retrospect, I very much imagine that this is how the last years of the twentieth century will be seen. The UN had of course existed since mid-century, but the UN had never had more than moral authority. What was being patched together now was a system with teeth. At the top were the financiers—bankers, currency traders, hedge-fund operators, and the like—all connected electronically. There were the gigantic bureaucratically-organized transnationals that during this period were absorbing and consolidating literally millions of formerly independent enterprises. There were the global trade bureaucrats—International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO), and so on, but also including institutions like the US Federal Reserve, treaty organizations like the European Union (EU) or North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—whose chief role seemed to be to protect the interests of the first two. And, finally, there were the various tiers of NGOs, whose role, from providing farm credits to inoculating infants or providing food during famines, increasingly came to be to provide services that states had once been expected to supply, but had effectively now been forbidden from doing by the IMF. The remarkable thing was that this was achieved through an ideology of radical individualism: above all, a broad rejection of the claims of common community—and political community in particular. We were all to be rational individuals on the market, aiming to acquire goods. Insofar as we were different, it was to be a matter of personal self-realization through consumption, since consumption, in turn, was assumed to be largely about the creation and expression of identities. Then, of course, identity could be said to circle back: since all political and economic questions were assumed to be effectively settled (history, in this respect, was over) identity politics became about the only politics that could be considered legitimate.

Then History Began Again

All this makes it easy to see why the Zapatista rebellion—which began January 1, 1994, the day in which the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect—marked such a turning point. The Zapatistas, with their rejection of the old-fashioned guerilla strategy of seizing state control through armed struggle, with their call instead for the creation of autonomous, democratic, self-governing communities, in alliance with a global network of like-minded democratic revolutionaries, managed to crystallize, often in beautiful poetic language, all the strains of opposition that had been slowly coalescing in the years before. As members of the Midnight Notes Collective aptly began pointing out even at the time, opposition to IMF-imposed structural adjustment policies, (whether it took the form of Latin American indigenous rights campaigns, African food riots, or Indonesian Islamist movements) almost invariably was based on the moral defense of some collective resource: the right to treat land, or food, or fossil fuels, or even culture, not as a marketable commodity but as a common good collectively administered by some form of moral community—even if in fewer and fewer cases was the nation-state seen as the proper guardian of such rights or the framework of the moral community in question. Almost always, their sights were set both more locally and on a planetary scale. The Zapatistas, with their deft ability to employ emerging global communication technologies to mobilize international networks to defend their own autonomous enclaves in the Lacandon Rain Forest, were not only the perfect symbol, they managed to articulate what was happening through a new approach to the very idea of revolution.

In turn, it was the Zapatistas who began, with their two international encuentros "For Humanity and Against Neoliberalism," to lay the foundation for what came to be known as the "anti-globalization" movement. Now this term, as I have said many times before, is something of a misnomer. It was basically an invention of the media. The most dynamic and important elements in the movement always saw it as aiming for a genuine, democratic form of globalization; at the very least a return to the sort of planetary consciousness from which the term first emerged. In the case of anarchists, autonomists, and other such radical elements, it meant the effacement of all international borders entirely. What emerged from the Zapatista encuentros was a loosely organized planetary network called Peoples' Global Action (PGA), one of whose aims was to put nonviolent direct action back on the world stage as a force for global revolution. PGA was significant above all in that it explicitly rejected the participation of political parties or any group whose purpose was to become a government. It was PGA, in turn, that put out the first "calls to action" that eventually culminated in the November 1999 actions in Seattle. Rather than trying to narrative the story myself—it will be told many times, in different ways, over the course of the book—let me instead provide the reader with a time line of only the most important events. What follows is a bare-bones account, and it reflects a very North American perspective, but readers may find it useful to consult, now and again, while reading this work:

> ***January 1, 1994***. North American Free Trade Agreement goes into effect. Uprising by the EZLN (or Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or Zapatistas) in Chiapas begins with a surprise military offensive that leads, briefly, to the seizure of Chiapas' capital, San Christobal de las Casas. The Zapatistas, however, quickly transform from an offensive force to a defensive one, creating a series of self-governing autonomous communities, seeking international allies, and promulgating a politics of direct action, democratic experimentation, and a new approach to revolution that converges with the anarchist tradition in its refusal of traditional attempts to transform through the seizure of state power.
>
> ***August, 1997***. Second Zapatista "International Encuentro For Humanity

and Against Neoliberalism" in Spain ends with a call to create an international network, that ultimately comes to be known (in English) as Peoples' Global Action. Aside from the Zapatistas themselves, the core of PGA, at first, consists of the Brazilian Landless Farmers' Movement (MST), the Indian Karnataka State Farmers' Association (KRRS, a mass-based Gandhian direct action movement), anarchist or anarchist-inspired groups including Ya Basta! in Italy and Reclaim the Streets in the UK, and various indigenous and agrarian movements and radical labor unions.

June 18, 1999. "J18," the first massive PGA-sponsored global day of action, known alternately as the "Global Day of Action Against Financial Centers" or "Carnival Against Capitalism" to coincide with the G8 meetings of leaders of the major industrial powers, with coordinated actions in over a hundred cities worldwide from Australia to Zimbabwe. In America, several demos are organized, mostly under the banner of new American versions of Reclaim the Streets.

November 30, 1999. "N30" actions against the WTO ministerial meetings in Seattle, another international day of action proposed by PGA. The action is long in the planning but comes as a total surprise to the mainstream media, who see it as the birth of a movement. Seattle saw sharp divisions over tactics between nonviolent protesters conducting the lockdowns and blockades of the hotel where the ministerial is taking place, organized by the newly created Direct Action Network (DAN), and participants in a smaller "Black Bloc," mostly made up of anarchists and radical ecologists, who have a more militant interpretation of nonviolence, and who, after police begin to attack the blockaders, start a campaign of targeted property destruction against symbols of corporate power (mostly windows) downtown. On the first day, the meetings are actually shut down, and negotiations end in failure. The next few days see massive repression, culminating in the declaration of martial law and the summoning of the National Guard. The months immediately following Seattle are filled with a burst of new organizing and activity, and the creation of autonomous chapters of DAN in cities across the US, and even Canada.

April 16, 2000. "A16" actions against the meetings of the World Bank and IMF in Washington DC. While not as tactically successful as Seattle (the meetings are not shut down), A16 marks the beginning of a rapprochement between the DAN organizers and the autonomous Revolutionary Anti-Capitalist Bloc—the Black Bloc assembled for the occasion—with the RACB refraining from property destruction and instead providing support for blockaders and those in lockdown.

August 1, 2000. "R2K" actions against the Republican Convention in Philadelphia. Combined with D2K actions against the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles, these are collectively known among activists as R2D2. While

LA DAN rejects widespread direct action for a strategy of marches in alliance with community groups, the Philly actions, organized above all by DANs in New York, Philly, and DC, mark further integration of Black Blocs and blockaders, with the "Revolutionary Anti-Authoritarian Bloc" in this case providing a diversion to draw police away from the lockdowns. Philly is also marked by an attempt to create alliances between the mostly white DANs and radical people of color organizations, with mixed success. Retrospectively, it is seen as the point where the lockdown/blockade strategy has largely run its course, prompting an interest in creating more mobile tactics.

September 26, 2000. "S26" actions against the IMF/World Bank meetings in Prague, Czech Republic. This is the first large and dramatic action in Europe after Seattle. Like many European actions, the level of militancy is much greater than in the US. The actions see fierce clashes between Black Bloc anarchists and police, the first appearance of the festive "Pink Bloc," and the first international debut of the Italian "white overalls" tactics (the "Tute Bianche," organized by Italian Ya Basta!), a kind of comic mock army of activists in helmets, padding, shields, and often inflatable inner-tubes, who attempt to storm police lines armed, among other things, with balloons and water pistols.

January 20, 2001. "J20" protests at Bush's inauguration, the second largest inaugural protests in American history, though they receive almost no attention from the mainstream media. Most members of NYC DAN end up joining another Revolutionary Anti-Authoritarian Bloc. The Black Bloc manages to crash through police barricades and temporarily occupy Naval Memorial, hoisting a black flag and blocking the parade route, and Bush's motorcade, for some time before finally being forced out by secret service and police.

January 25–30, 2001. The first World Social Forum (WSF) is held in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Originally conceived as the radical alternative to the World Economic Forum (WEF)— a kind of junket and networking session for global officials and bureaucrats, usually held in Davos, Switzerland—the WSF rapidly becomes the intellectual center of the global movement against neoliberalism, with thousands of different organizations and individuals participating in hundreds of sessions.

April 20–22, 2001. Actions against the "Summit of the Americas," negotiations over the Free Trade Area of the Americas pact (FTAA) in Québec City, Canada. This is the first action where the authorities organize their strategy around building a large fence ("the wall") around the section of the city where the summit is to take place. The actions, organized primarily by the Montréal-based Convergence des Luttes Anti-Capitalistes, or CLAC, mainly aim attacks at the wall itself, as a symbol of the contradictions of neoliberalism.

July 19–21, 2001. Several hundred thousand protesters converge on Genoa, Italy, for the G8 meetings of the heads of industrialized nations. The wall strategy is again employed, and Italian police, who had traditionally been relatively tolerant of white overall tactics, adopt a strategy of extreme repression this time, refusing any contact with protest leaders and employing a systematic strategy of encouraging fascists and agent provocateurs to provide excuses to attack, arrest, and afterwards, systematically abuse and even torture activists. Genoa is seen as a watermark of repression in Europe and causes European groups to scramble to formulate a new strategy.

September 11, 2001. Attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. Anarchists in New York are among the first to mobilize against the upcoming war, with marches culminating in a march of six thousand people to Times Square a month after the event. These are almost completely ignored in the mainstream media. Actions being planned for the upcoming World Bank/IMF meetings in Washington DC are radically scaled back as the movement is forced to reconsider its overall strategic direction.

February 3–4, 2002. World Economic Forum protests in New York City. In the immediate wake of 911, the WEF announces it will relocate, this year, from Davos (where it has become the object of frequent activist sieges) to the Waldorf Astoria in New York "as an act of solidarity." Anarchists in NYC DAN and the newly created NYC Anti-Capitalist Convergence (ACC) are forced to throw together an action in a matter of months, abandoned by almost all of their usual NGO and Labor allies. The action is successfully and nonviolently pulled off, but is met by massive police intimidation and hundreds of arrests. The stress of 911, and of being forced to create a national mobilization out of nothing in such a short time, creates endless tensions within the New York scene and eventually leads to decline and eventual dissolution of DAN over the course of the next year.

September 10–14, 2003. WTO Ministerial in Cancún, Mexico. Mass actions by Mexican and global activists—including the dramatic suicide of a South Korean farmer—end in a definitive check of the WTO process.

November 17–21 2003. FTAA negotiations in Miami, met by the first genuinely large-scale national convergence in the US since 911. These meetings also see the first use, in the US, of a new policy of massive preemptive attacks and extreme police violence against protesters—an approach that comes to be known as the "Miami model" after Homeland Security announces it as the way to deal with such actions in the future. The free trade negotiations, on the other hand, come to nothing, marking the definitive end of the FTAA process.

I'll end here, not because Miami represents the end of anything (though some have argued it marks the end of one cycle of at least the North American movement), but rather, because it marks the end of the period covered in this book. September 11 and the "War on Terror" did certainly create a dramatically new climate in the United States, but its effects elsewhere were less profound, and certainly less enduring. In other parts of the world, repression was never so severe, and most managed to avoid the wave of xenophobia and militarist nationalism that did so much damage in the US. In many ways, the movement began to go into a new and broader stage, particularly in Latin America, with the wave of factory occupations and local assemblies in Argentina, or one-time PGA conveners like Evo Morales actually coming to power in Bolivia, events in Atenco, Oaxaca, and other parts of Mexico itself. I do not want to generalize or make predictions: at moments of genuine change, history makes fools of all of us who try. But I will at least repeat what I have said before (e.g. Graeber 2002; Graeber and Grubacic 2004): that anarchism, as a political philosophy, and anarchist ideas and imperatives, have become more and more important everywhere in the world. There is a broad realization that the age of revolutions is by no means over, but that revolution will, in the twenty-first century, take on increasingly unfamiliar forms. First and foremost, I would hope this book will serve as a resource for those who wish to think about expanding their sense of political possibilities, for anyone curious about what new directions radical thought and action might take.

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It is very difficult to write acknowledgments for a book like this. One does not wish to single out anyone for fear of suggesting that someone else is less deserving. But I can start by acknowledging the love and support of my friends and family, and my supporters at Yale during the unfortunate events that transpired, to some degree, as a result of the very research on which this book is based. The period during which I was conducting research, and then writing, this book was one of almost continual stress and personal tragedy: marked by the prolonged illness and eventual death of both my brother and my mother, all against the backdrop of having to deal with endless, bizarre campaigns by those elements of the senior faculty at Yale apparently determined to drive me out by any means necessary. I will not enter into details, but I would like to thank, first of all, my colleagues at Yale who provided the support and sense of community that made the place livable for me: Jennifer Bair, Bernard Bate, Richard Burger, Kamari Clarke, Hal Conklin, Michael Denning, Saroja Dorairajoo, Ilana Gershon, Paul Gilroy, Thomas Blum Hansen, Natalie Jerimijenko, Bun Lai, Enrique Mayer, Sam Messer, Marilda Menezes, John Middleton, Karen Phillips, Dhooleka Raj, Iman Saca, Lidia Santos, Jim Scott, Mary Smith, John Szwed, Thomas Tartaron, Frederic Vandenberge, Immanuel Wallerstein, David Watts, and Eric Worby, to name a few. Friends and colleagues outside of Yale who gave me help and encouragement in this project are far too numerous to list. I would like to be able, too, to thank by name everyone who pitched in after the department voted to terminate my contract, but it would be impossible. Almost five thousand people signed the petitions Yale students created; several departments (Chicago, Sussex, Glasgow, Manchester) and organizations ranging from the Global Studies Association to the Canadian Union of Postal Workers wrote collective letters to the department demanding an explanation (of course they received none), as did an endless stream of individual scholars. Most of all, I want to thank the students at Yale, and again this list is by no means comprehensive—and heavily weighted towards those I came to know in my last few years at Yale—but they were always my greatest inspiration there: Muhammad Ikraam Abdu-Noor, Ahmed Afzal, Colleen Asper, Ping-Ann Ado, Omolade Adunbi, Nikhil Anand, Caitlin Barrett, Kalanit Baumhauft, Ben Begleiter, Nina Bhatt, Rebecca Bohrman, Sheridan Booker, Devika Bordia, Lisa Allette Brooks, Elizabeth Busbee, Lucia Cantero, David Carston-Knowles, Durba Chattaraj, Linda Chhay, Kate Clancey, Robert Clark, Seth Curley, Anthony Dalton, Amelia Frank-Vitale, Antonios Finitsis, Thomas Frampton, Emily Friedrichs, Ajay Gandhi, Vladimir Gil, Josh Gordon, Jessica Gussberg, Annie Harper, Joseph Hill, Emily Hitch, Jennifer Jackson, Nazima Kadir, Kristin Kajdzik, Csilla Kalocsai, Brenda Kondo, Adrian LeCesne, Moon-Hee Lee, Kat Lo, Molly Margaretten, Andrew Mathews, Madeleine Meek, Christina Moon, Yancey Orr, Simon Moshenberg, Jason Nesbitt, Nana Okura, Juan Orrantia, Jonathan Padwe, Richard Payne, Anne Rademacher, Mieka Ritsema, Elliot Robson, Phoebe Rounds, Arian Schulze, Colin Smith, Olga Sooudi, Sarah Stillman, Will Tanzman, Jordan Treviño, Karen Warner, Kristina Weaver, and Tiantian Zhang.

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I came into this project with little but myself and my own sense of optimism. I pursued it with the growing understanding that, no matter how bleak and how dangerous some of the places through which one must pass, to live as a rebel—in the constant awareness of the possibilities of revolutionary transformation, and amongst those who dream of it—is surely the best way one can live.

INTRODUCTION

YOU BEGIN WITH RAGE, YOU MOVE ON TO SILLY FANTASIES ...

"So," Jaggi says. "I have an idea for what Ya Basta! might contribute to the actions in Québec City. The Canadian press keeps framing this as some kind of alien invasion. Thousands of American anarchists are going to be invading Canada to disrupt the Summit. The Québécois press is doing the same thing: it's the English invasion all over again. So my idea is we play with that. We reenact the battle of Québec."

Puzzled stares from the Americans at the table.

"That was the battle in 1759 in which the British conquered the city in the first place. They surprised the French garrison by climbing up these cliffs just to the west of the Plains of Abraham, near the old fort. So here's my idea. You guys can suit up in your Ya Basta! outfits, and climb the exact same cliff, except—no, wait, listen! This part is important—over all the padding and the chemical jumpsuits, you'll all be wearing Québec Nordiques hockey jerseys."

"You want us to climb a cliff?" asked Moose.

"Uh huh."

"And how high exactly is this cliff?"

"Oh, I don't know, 60 meters. What's that, about 180 feet?"

"So you want us to climb a 180-foot cliff geared up in gloves and helmets and gas masks and foam rubber padding?"—Moose acting as if Jaggi might actually be serious about this.

"Think of it this way: the helmets and padding would be very helpful if you fall down at all. Which is likely because you have to figure the cliffs *will* be defended."

Moose: "Oh, great. So now we're climbing a 180-foot cliff with riot cops all over the top."

"Oh come on, you're probably all going to get arrested immediately just for *wearing* those suits. You might as well actually do something with them first. And the symbolism would be perfect."

"I refuse to be so pessimistic," I say. "Let's imagine some of us get through. We scale the cliffs. Suddenly we're inside the security perimeter…"

"Well, actually, no," says Jaggi, looking down at the map of the city. The map of the city is drawn in felt tip on a large unfolded napkin, on the table of a pastry shop in New York City's Little Italy, surrounded by various salt shakers and sugar bowls being used to represent imaginary activist and police units, all flanked by empty bottles of beer and a former chocolate cake. Six activists are crowded around the table, three Canadians, three representatives of the New York Ya Basta! Collective—all that are left of what had started as a much larger group. "We're kind of assuming the fence will actually run around the edge of the cliff as well."

Jaggi confers briefly with his two Québécois friends, who nod agreement. One, Nicole, adds another line to the map to make this more explicit.

"You mean we get over the cliffs and we still have to go over the wall?" someone asks.

"Oh come on," says Jaggi. "If you can get up a 180-foot cliff, a 15-foot chain-link fence is going to be a problem?"

"Fine, we're inside." I'm insisting on my scenario. "Fifty activists in yellow chemical jumpsuits and—what was it, some Québec team's hockey jerseys?—make it over the wall. We are inside the security perimeter. We have reversed the British invasion. Now what do we do? Occupy the citadel? Present a petition?"

"Actually, that would be really funny," says one of the Yabbas. "We fight our way up the cliffs past two thousand riot cops, we go over the wall, and then, when we get there, we just present a petition."

"To who?"

"Well to Bush, obviously."

"How do we know where Bush is going to be?" asks someone else.

"He will be staying in the Concord hotel," says one of the Québécois anarchists. "It will be easy to find; you can see it from almost anywhere in the city. Especially easy now," he smiles. "Just look for the building with the surface-to-air missiles on top."

"Plus about ten thousand snipers and secret service men, presumably, with endless high tech surveillance equipment…"

"…which will, in turn, be disrupted by our vast fleet of remote-controlled model airplanes…"

Conversation had, in fact, been seriously degenerating for at least half an hour.

It had started out seriously enough, as one of those three-hour marathon conversations about everything. The Canadians were in town as part of a traveling activist tour, put together by the CLAC, a Montréal-based anarchist group whose French acronym stood for Convergence des Luttes Anti-Capitalistes, or "Convergence of Anti-Capitalist Struggles." It was early March 2001. They were touring to mobilize against the Summit of the Americas due to be held in Québec City on April 20, to be attended by every head of state in the Western Hemisphere (except Cuba). This event was to see the signing of a preliminary draft of something called the Free Trade Area of the Americas Act, an attempt, essentially, to extend NAFTA to the entire hemisphere. These efforts, spearheaded by the United States, were, in fact, ultimately foiled, and the people in that pastry shop, unlikely though it may seem, played a significant role in foiling them. But this is a bit of a different story and anyway I'm jumping ahead. At any rate, the conversation started out in a Lower East Side Mexican restaurant called Tres Aztecas, where several activists from the New York City Direct Action Network took the visitors—Jaggi from Montréal and a quieter, francophone couple from Québec City itself—out to dinner. Actually, two of the NYC DAN people were themselves Canadians: a couple named Mac and Lesley, originally from Toronto, currently living in New York. She was a sociology student at Columbia, he currently employed as a house painter and volunteer for the National Lawyers Guild. Most of the others were also part of the NYC Ya Basta! collective. This was a newly created group inspired by a group of the same name in Italy, whose name, however was derived from a slogan (it means "Enough Already!") made famous by the Zapatista rebels in Chiapas, who had, in turn, begun their insurrection on January 1, 1994, the day that NAFTA first went into effect.

In activist circles that year, Ya Basta! had something of the quality of a Next Big Thing. Probably, this was most of all for their spectacularly innovative tactics: members of the group were famous for covering themselves in all sorts of elaborate padding, made from everything from foam rubber sheeting to rubber ducky flotation devices, combining it with helmets and plastic shields, so one looked like some kind of futuristic Greek hoplite, then topping the whole thing with gas masks and white chemical protective suits. The idea is that, so suited up, there's relatively little the cops can do that will actually hurt you. Of course, you are rendered so clumsy there's probably not that much you could do to hurt anyone else; but that's kind of the point. Its exponents claim the tactic is rooted in a new philosophy of civil disobedience. Where the old-fashioned, masochistic, Gandhian approach encourages activists to hold out their willingness to let the police beat them up as a sign of moral superiority, the "white overalls" proposed an ethos of protection: as long as you refuse to harm others, it is completely legitimate to take whatever measures necessary to avoid harm to yourself. The costume also makes one look rather ridiculous, but that's kind of the point too. Ya Basta! columns would often play on it by, for instance, attacking police lines with balloons or water pistols. What really impressed a lot of activists in America, though, was that such groups had a real social base. Ya Basta! emerged from Italy's extremely extensive network of squats and occupied social centers (the "white overalls" began, in effect, as the army of the squats). They also had their own intellectuals: around that time the works of Italian Autonomist thinkers like Toni Negri, Paolo Virno, and Bifo Berardi were just beginning to be translated and disseminated over the Internet and were being picked up by activists across America.

I shouldn't exaggerate. In the spring of 2001, the vast majority of American anarchists knew next to nothing of Italian theory. Still, there were certain very enthusiastic exceptions. In New York, the most significant among them was a man who went by the name of Moose. A tall, gangly young man who almost always wore a fisherman's cap, Moose was, by profession, a retoucher of fashion photos. He was also active in NYC DAN. Inspired by what he had read about the movement in Italy after Ya Basta!'s dramatic appearance at the IMF protests in Prague, Moose did a little research and figured out where you could actually buy cheap chemical jumpsuits. He mail-ordered several and started occasionally wearing them to marches. One day, during a police-brutality march, a student from Italy who had actually done some work with Ya Basta! walked up to him and asked what was going on. And, so, New York Ya Basta! was born.

It was, in his conception, simultaneously an embrace of Italian tactics and of some of the broader principles developed by Italian Autonomist Marxism, which emphasized the refusal of work, "exodus" or engaged withdrawal from mainstream institutions, and, critically, freedom of movement across borders. In Italy, "white overalls" had made a series of dramatic actions against immigration detention camps, to highlight the fact much of what was touted as "globalization" actually meant, in practice, opening borders to the movement of money, manufactures, and certain forms of information, while radically increasing the barriers and controls over the movement of human beings. This idea had already struck a chord in North America, where activists were fond of pointing out that the US Border Patrol had actually tripled in size in the years since the signing of NAFTA. A lot of us were already arguing that the whole point of "free trade" was in fact to confine most of the world's population in impoverished global ghettoes with heavily militarized borders, in which existing social protections could be removed and the resulting terror and desperation fully exploited by global capital. The question was how to bring the two—ideas and tactics—together.

If nothing else, the prospect excited people. The NYC Ya Basta! collective grew rapidly, just as similar collectives (the Wombles in England, the Wombats in Australia) were growing all over the Anglophone world. Much of the first part of the conversation at Tres Aztecas had consisted of Moose talking about Ya Basta!.

Later, at the pastry shop (Jaggi's friend insisted we find one, as he was something of a chocolate addict), the discussion moved on to potential border actions, the state of anarchy in Canada, Ontario's asshole governor, movement celebrities and why they are annoying, philosophy, anthropology, music—A typical endless activist conversation about everything. Jaggi explained that, as in much of Canada, Québécois anarchists were divided largely between hardcore squatter types and grad students ("like these two—they'll probably quit the moment the dissertation is finished")—though there was also a smattering of old-fashioned syndicalist types. No anarchist labor unions per se, but they work within existing unions. The real dramatic growth had been within the globalization movement, where, as in so many places, there was an emerging division of labor between NGOs and big labor groups, which dominated policy discussions, and anarchists, who were quickly coming to dominate the direct action end of things. In Montréal, there were basically two groups organizing actions: CLAC, and something called Operation SalAMI. CLAC isn't officially anarchist, of course. Officially, it's just "anti-authoritarian" (well, anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist, opposed to all forms of racial and gender oppression, dedicated to direct action, and unwilling to negotiate with inherently undemocratic organizations, which in practice means, basically, "anarchist").

"So, what about SalAMI? They aren't anarchists?"

"Oh, I'm sure there's some people in it who consider themselves anarchists of some sort or another."

"So, what are they then?

Mac interjected, "Oh, you know. The usual anti-corporate types. Not anti-capitalists. They originally came out of the campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment in 1998. At the time, they organized a really good action in Ottawa. But… well, they're pacifists. I guess that would be the best way to sum it up."

"Did you see the guidelines they first proposed for the Québec City actions?" asked Jaggi. "Absolute nonviolence. Part of their principles of conduct were no "verbal violence," no one is allowed to use bad language. No, literally, I'm not making this up. Spray-painting slogans is a form of violence. No wearing of masks or other items of clothing that cover your face…"

The other Canadians were joining in. "Which then gives them the right to micro-manage everything."

"They're total control freaks. Marshals, everything."

"So, I don't get it," says one of the Americans. "What kind of process do these guys use?"

"Yeah," another American asked. "Are they democratic, or do they have a formal leadership structure? Before an action, do they hold spokescouncils?"

"Oh, yeah, yeah, they do all that. Or at least, they do now. When they started out it was totally top-down, with a charismatic leadership, orders from above. Ostensibly, that's all changed now. But all the key decisions, like the code of conduct, are always already made in the call to action before you even show up to the spokescouncil. So, it's basically a sham because with marshals to control everything, any kind of self-organization becomes meaningless."

"Plus," says Jaggi, "they still do have a sort of charismatic leadership. Which... well, okay. Have you noticed how pacifists *always* seem to develop a charismatic leadership? Gandhi, King, the Dalai Lama. Something about the pacifist ethos seems to just produce them. When I was at A16 I saw these idiots carrying signs with huge pictures of Gandhi on them, and below it there was some kind of quote from him saying 'what's important is not me, but my message.' So I had to go up to them and ask them, 'don't you think there's a bit of a contradiction here?'"

Discussion ensues on the merits of Gandhi, as opposed to other figures in the Indian Independence movement. The consensus seems to be that he was a highly ambivalent figure. On the one hand, he had a lot of very anarchistic ideals. On the other, he was a weird, sexually twisted patriarch who collaborated with the far-from-revolutionary Congress party and openly fostered a cult of personality around himself. One of the Canadians insisted Gandhi's pacifism actually delayed independence by a generation. One of the Americans emphasizes that Gandhi did also say that, while nonviolence was an ideal, those who resist oppression violently are morally superior to those who don't resist at all—a sentiment his more self-righteous Western acolytes always seem to forget.

"What bothers me about the whole concept of pacifism," says Mac, "is that it's fundamentally elitist. Poor people—people who have to live every day with violence by police, who are used to it, who expect it... they're not going to see anything admirable, let alone heroic, in *inviting* police violence, and then facing it passively."

I always find such opinions slightly disconcerting, coming from who they are. Mac is one of the most likeable, easygoing, rather self-effacingly silly people I know. I often wonder if he's even capable of anger. His wife is much the same.

"What do you think?" I ask Lesley.

"Oh, I totally agree. First of all, the whole idea that you're going to reveal the true coercive nature of the state by showing how they'll attack you even when you are posing them no physical threat—well, come on. You're telling poor people something they don't already know?"

"I worked with OCAP—that's the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty—for three years in Toronto," said Mac, "and one thing we found is that if, say, you're working with homeless people or genuinely oppressed communities, either they're not going to do anything, or they're going to want to directly confront the people who've been fucking them over. Which is how you get those 'riots' like the one last spring in Toronto." Lesley explains Mac is referring to a march on June 15, 2000, organized by OCAP, in which over a thousand homeless people, along with housing activists, were attacked by riot police when they insisted on the right to address parliament, and ended up in a pitched battle that lasted hours. "After the third cavalry charge against peaceful protesters, everyone just exploded. They started throwing everything in sight, ripping up the sidewalks, street signs, throwing trash cans."

"Now, wait a minute," I protest. "Gandhi himself worked with a lot of poor people."

"True," Jaggi interjects, "but that's within a very specific religious tradition. If you're a Hindu, being able to endure your lowly position within the caste hierarchy, making that a sign of virtue—that's what it's all about."

And so on. The whole conversation seems to me a little pat and one-sided. I point out that, since Seattle, unions had been panicking about the possibility of "violence," or even just property destruction. Others countered that I was talking about union bureaucrats, not the rank and file. Well, what about the poor people's groups that critique militant tactics as a product of middle-class white privilege, that real oppressed groups would never be allowed to get away with? Someone changes the subject.

"And have you noticed how the SalAMI types are always carefully keeping track of which politicians or celebrities or rich people approve of them. The whole mind-set is completely elitist."

Anyway, SalAMI put out their pacifist call to action, and then CLAC put out their own, calling for a "diversity of tactics." By this they meant, space should be made for art and puppets, space should be made for traditional Gandhian "come-take-me-away" civil disobedience, and space should be made for more militant tactics too. The critical thing is to ensure that, in the end, everyone will stand in solidarity with one another. As it turned out, very few people registered for the SalAMI spokescouncil, so they cancelled it and now were concentrating on doing something in Montréal. CLAC's spokescouncil on the other hand went well enough that it lead to the creation of a new local group—called CASA, the Summit of the Americas Welcoming Committee. CASA was now doing frenetic local organizing. Teams were going to door to door in working-class neighborhoods near the old fortress. It was a unique opportunity because the Canadian police had recently announced that, come the summit, the old town and the area surrounding the Convention Center where the meetings were to be held was going to be surrounded by a four kilometer-long security fence. Only those with ID cards certifying that they lived within the perimeter would be allowed inside. They kept issuing contradictory statements as to where, exactly, the fence would run, but it would definitely be cutting many neighborhoods in half. Children would have to pass heavily militarized police checkpoints to return home from school. Local people were already referring to it as "the wall."

One should bear in mind, Jaggi noted, that this is a population that's, because of its history, already extremely suspicious of the central government. Even Québecois nationalism is a very weird, proletarian kind of nationalism: French-speakers see themselves as the white working class of Eastern Canada, which to some extent, is true. It was at this point—right around the time Mac and Lesley had to leave—that we got into the politics of the wall; about the promised militarization of the Canadian border (during trade talks in Windsor the year before, for instance, two-thirds of the Americans who tried to cross the border were turned away, and a fair number were arrested). The question was how to plan a border action that would draw attention to the hypocrisy of militarizing the border and building walls inside a city in order to be able to shield the political leaders from any danger of contact with their constituents—not to mention the rhetoric of "free trade" knocking down walls and unifying the planet, when, in order to even be able to sign them, one has to do the exact opposite. The rest of us started bouncing around ideas. Possible border actions. Eventually, this started leading to scenario questions, and then, to the cliffs of Québec City. That was toward the end of the conversation, actually—by that point we were all a bit worse for wear, and not long after we broke, went home, and went to sleep.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

I've started with the conversation at the pastry shop for a number of reasons. For one thing, it's funny. I thought it might convey something of the sense of a movement that is, as we shall see, particularly prone to forms of action that are simultaneously profoundly foolish and utterly serious. Such a conversation, especially juxtaposed with the serious arguments about Gandhi and so forth, seemed the best way to give the reader an immediate sense of what being involved with such a movement is actually like. Also it makes for a better book.

Such a conversation also immediately raises an issue I'll be struggling with throughout the book: what does one do with actors' identities when discussing politically and legally sensitive conversations? New York Ya Basta!, for example, is almost certainly still listed in certain police intelligence systems as a terrorist organization. In the weeks before the summit, both American and Canadian police identified it as one of the principle potentially "violent elements," and anyone suspected of involvement in Ya Basta! was seized when trying to cross the border, detained for days, and extensively interrogated. All this was ridiculous. Ya Basta!, as I mentioned, was based on a principle of what is sometimes called "radical defense." Members armored themselves against batons and rubber bullets, but they justified doing so precisely because they refused to do anything that might hurt anyone else. But in this context, the fact that claims are ridiculous is largely irrelevant. Reclaim the Streets New York, a group that specializes in unpermitted street parties, has been classified by certain police task forces as a terrorist group as well.[1] These things never make any sense. One thing one learns quickly as an activist is that the hand of repression is extremely random. As a result, the conversation with which I began, however obviously facetious, could, conceivably, be classified as a terrorist conspiracy.

Imagine, for a moment, that there had been a hidden microphone in the pastry shop. Imagine some policeman or FBI agent monitoring the above conversation. This is not outside the realm of possibility: perhaps they had been expecting some Mafiosi to meet there and plan an actual crime. Next, imagine—a not unlikely possibility—that the policeman listening to this conversation has absolutely no sense of humor. What would he be likely to think? Here are members of a possibly terrorist organization, they are meeting with a Canadian named Jaggi Singh, and talking about taking part in some kind of violent conflict involving President Bush. If the officer in question proceeded to run the names past the Canadian police, he would immediately be informed that Jaggi Singh is a notorious anarchist who has been arrested time and time again in connection with illegal protests.

Now this latter point is technically true, but once again, absurd if you have the slightest bit of context. In Canada, Jaggi is something of a public figure. He appears on TV regularly, as spokesperson for CLAC or some other radical organization. As a result, he gets arrested all the time. It has become something of a running gag in radical circles in Canada. Before every big action or mobilization, the police will almost invariably come in and arrest Jaggi Singh; partly, it would seem, just because he's the only prominent anarchist they've actually heard of.

> "Here come the anti-US protesters again. Everything in place?
> "Riot control gas?" "Check."
> "Shields and batons?" "Check."
> "Security barriers?" "Check."
> "Jaggi Singh arrested?" Check."[2]

One could multiply examples. It's always a preventative arrest; Jaggi has never actually been charged with much of anything, let alone convicted, at least in part because he's never actually done anything illegal. More than anything else, Jaggi is a radical journalist. As such, he became the regular public spokesperson for revolutionary groups. But the whole point of using the same person as one's spokesperson all the time is that, that way, the faces of those actually planning the actions need never be seen. The idea that Jaggi, who is in fact on a public speaking tour, appearing under his own name, would come to an action planning meeting is absurd. But again, the fact that its absurd is not strictly relevant. If the police decided to charge us all with conspiracy to commit an act of terrorism, legally, it would quite possible for them to do so. They would have an extremely hard time getting a conviction, but they could easily make all our lives quite difficult for years to come.

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[1] At the same time, other, equally public, groups that are in fact engaged in more militant activities never seem to appear on the same lists. The arbitrariness makes all this a very effective strategy, since no one feels safe. However, there's no real way to know whether one is dealing with an intentional strategy or the simple effects of bureaucratic stupidity.

[2] http://www.snappingturtle.net/flit/archives/2003_07_29.html, accessed 6/9/04.

All this might make the very idea of writing an ethnography like this rather a dubious proposition. But one has to weigh the legal possibilities with the fact that nothing like that has ever actually happened. I don't believe there has ever been a case, over the last four years, of an activist being arrested because of something they said, or were said to have said, in a meeting—let alone an informal conversation. Activists are regularly arrested for being public spokespeople, like Jaggi. Activists have been detained at borders for belonging to supposedly violent organizations—like, for instance, many members of the New York Ya Basta! collective were eventually to be. Hundreds of activists—and, often, ordinary citizens who just happen to be standing next them—have been swept up in mass arrests during protests. When this happens a few will almost always be randomly singled out for felony charges: "assaulting an officer" or the like. These charges almost never hold up because they are almost invariably completely made up; however, they succeed in tying activists down with endless court dates and legal fees. There have definitely been bizarre and outrageous acts of repression against individuals. Activists have been put in jail for links they put on web pages, or for the possession of devices used to detect genetically modified food. None have been charged over anything they were supposed to have said in a meeting. Nonetheless, the fear that they might has had a stifling effect on activist life for years, and that fear has only grown with increasing state repression. Meetings themselves have become increasingly secretive. Those attending them become more paranoid. The results, I think, have been disastrous.

They are particularly disastrous, in my opinion, because what goes on in meetings, the structure of decision-making, is critical to the movement. Perhaps more than anything else, this is a movement about creating new forms of democracy. One reason why the media have been able to largely write off the so-called "anti-globalization" movement as an incoherent babble of positions without any central theme or central ideology is precisely because its ideology is embedded in its practice. In conscious contradistinction to past revolutionary groups, we are not going to come up with some abstract party line favoring "democracy" and then turn ourselves into a well-oiled authoritarian machine dedicated to seizing power wherever possible, so as to someday, eventually, be able to introduce it, groups like DAN or CLAC are determined to live their principles. To a large extent (as I've argued before: Graeber 2002), the democratic practice they've developed *is* their ideology.

To my mind this is an extremely healthy and an extremely refreshing attitude. It's a large part of the reason I became involved in such groups to begin with. On the other hand, it creates some real dilemmas of representation. We have a movement that sees itself as creating new forms of democracy, but, because of security fears, its actual democratic process cannot be represented to anyone outside the movement in anything but the most abstract terms. Everyone is so worried about the dangers of legal repression that one can never talk about the concrete specifics of what happened at any particular meeting. It is especially ironic because this is a movement that's otherwise remarkably sophisticated at self-representation. It includes a host of radical filmmakers, web journalists, radio activists; it involves a vast Independent Media network that first emerged from Seattle and has continued, during every major convergence, to provide detailed minute-by-minute accounts of the action. Afterwards, a video documentary will quickly, and invariably, appear. However, none of these representations will normally contain a single description of a concrete act of collective decision-making. Every major action, for instance, tends to be proceeded by a series of spokescouncils, assemblies where hundreds or even thousands of people gather to plan the action collectively, without any formal leadership structure. Yet none has ever been filmed. This despite the fact that, at some point during at least half the major spokescouncils I have attended, some radical filmmaker asked permission to film some part of the proceedings. They were invariably rebuffed. In principle, spokescouncils are open events: anyone is allowed in who is not working either for some news outlet or law enforcement, and participants are often reminded not to discuss anything they wouldn't want the cops to know. Still, when requests are made to film, someone always blocks. As a result, as far as I'm aware, no such event has ever been recorded. So one ends up with video documentaries that show activists marching down the street chanting "this is what democracy looks like," but contain no images of anyone actually practicing democracy.

The result is a peculiar disconnect. When activists talk to each other, they tend to talk endlessly about "process"—the nuts and bolts of direct democracy. While preparing for a major action, it seems all one does is go to meetings, trainings, more meetings. But, when one reads accounts of the same action written afterwards, almost all of this tends to disappear.

So, first of all, this book is meant to fill a gap. I will begin by using my own experience to convey a sense of what it's actually like to take part in the planning for, and eventually participate in, a major action against a global summit. To illustrate the sorts of things activists actually argue about, what sort of issues or events become collective dramas; to get some sense of what it's like to wade through a marathon, two-day meeting, and to come out of it feeling as if one has, in fact, just waded through a marathon two-day meeting, but at the same time that one has witnessed something profoundly transformative. As the reader may have noticed, I am making no pretense of objectivity here. I did not become involved in this movement in order to write an ethnography. I became involved as a participant. I come from an old leftist family, and for most of my life have considered myself an anarchist. If for most of my life, I also rarely got involved in anarchist politics, it was mainly because, in the 1980s and much of the 1990s, the anarchist politics I was exposed to struck me as petty, atomized, and pointlessly contentious—full of would-be sectarians whose sects consisted only of themselves. To suddenly discover the existence of a movement with a radically different sensibility, which placed enormous emphasis on mutual respect, cooperation, and egalitarian decision-making, was profoundly exhilarating. It was as if the movement I'd always wanted to be part of had suddenly come into existence. Even when I'm critical of the movement, I'm critical as an insider, someone whose ultimate purpose is to further its goals. My eventual decision to write an ethnography emerged from the same impulse. To some degree, of course, as a trained ethnographer you can't really help yourself. Almost as soon as I got involved, I found that the notes I was taking at meetings were growing more and more detailed. They started containing little observations about hair and shoe styles, posture, habits, parenthetical reflections on little activist rituals. Still, my decision to write all this up in ethnographic form came largely because, as a participant, it struck me as an important way of furthering one of the movement's goals: the dissemination of a certain vision of democratic possibility. In my anthropological training, I had acquired a skill that seemed perfectly suited for conveying much of what was missing from existing accounts of the movement. Though it did also occur to me that doing so would also make an extremely interesting ethnography.

But then there was the problem of how to do so without actually endangering anyone.

In the end, the solution I came up with was this. On really sensitive issues (as opposed to silly fantasies) I would not quote anything that had not already been said in some kind of public forum. I would quote things that had appeared on activist listservs, which everyone knows are monitored, or in spokescouncils or meetings open to the public, that one has to assume are probably infiltrated.[3]

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[3] Some action spokescouncils are very decidedly not open and I have avoided even mentioning

About other forums I would be more oblique. When dealing with things said in public forums that had any bearing on actions, I would avoid using actual names. This is not hard because for the most part, I don't actually know people's actual names. Or, at least, I don't tend to know full names. Many activists go by "action names," which they use even with their closest friends. In activist circles, it is possible to work very closely with someone for years, become close friends, even perhaps lovers, and never actually learn their full legal name. When I do know someone's full legal name it is almost invariably because they are, like Jaggi, public figures of some sort or another whose identity does not need to be protected. Finally, whether I am describing meetings or actions, I would stick to events in which I myself fully participated; this meant I would not be asking anyone to assume, pseudonymously, a risk that I am not willing to undergo under my actual identity.

I didn't have to start by telling the story of the mobilization around the Summit of the Americas in Québec City, of course. There were a number of others I could have chosen. In part, I started with Québec precisely because of these sorts of considerations. Not only because all the felonies described in the account were committed in Canada, but also, because this was a very militant event—the most militant, in fact, in which I've ever been involved—in which, as it happens, the most serious act of conspiracy of which I could possibly be accused is conspiracy to pull down a chain-link fence and then walk away from it. The story of Québec City has other obvious advantages. For one thing, I think it's a pretty good story. It's also useful because I wanted to avoid both the temptation to idealize the movement, or the (equally annoying) habit many activists have of only talking about its problems, which often leaves outsiders wondering why anyone would get involved in such a movement to begin with. The Québec story seemed perfect in this respect because it combines some of the best and the worst of everything. It allowed me to talk both about groups whose democratic process worked remarkably well, and others in which it was really quite atrocious; both groups which endured, and groups that fell apart; both actions that were amazingly successful, and others that were complete disasters.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Part I, therefore, will largely be about Québec. Chapter 1 will consist of a kind of diary account of the month immediately following the CLAC caravan's visit; Chapter 2 of a more detailed account of the "consulta" in Québec City

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them: there were none that I know of in Québec. Groups like the Direct Action Network in New York had open meetings, though more often than not everyone at a given meeting knew each other. Groups like Ya Basta! were not exactly closed but more intimate, and I have therefore tried to avoid describing either the smaller DAN meetings, or any Ya Basta! meeting, in any case in which action scenarios were discussed.

about a month before the actions; Chapter 3 will describe events leading up to the abortive action at the Seaway International Bridge at Akwesasne; Chapter 4 will describe the Québec actions themselves. It will take the form of a first-person narrative, with a fair amount of reconstructed dialogue of the kind with which I began. It will also include some pretty extensive extracts from my field notes, these mainly consisting of detailed reconstructions of what each person actually said at important activist meetings, but with occasional comments or reflections.

Part II will consist of analysis. It begins (Chapter 7) with comments on the social content of the movement, about which, I believe, there is a great deal of misunderstanding. This will be followed by a long chapter (Chapter 8) on meetings, and experiments in the creation of new democratic forms; another mapping out a typology of actions (Chapter 9), and finally a discussion of the politics of representation: media, puppets and so on (Chapter 10). I will end with a theoretical conclusion ("Imagination," Chapter 10) consisting of a single chapter about violence and the imagination.

Writing this book—particularly the first part—has presented me with some real dilemmas of representation. I first tried to write Part I almost completely in diary form, which I thought would give some sense of the fractured and episodic quality of activist life. It was impossible, though, to maintain this. For one thing, it soon became apparent that, if I did any real justice to the richness of events, I would produce a book that no press would even consider publishing. It would be far too long. Condensation, however, brought with it endless compromise. The more one had to economize, the more the urge to put the whole thing in some sort of overall narrative form. Narrative imperatives, on the other hand, to some degree flew directly in the face of the logic of what I was trying to describe. Most obviously: good narratives don't have hundreds of characters. Yet to employ standard narrative techniques and allow some individuals to typify others would be to employ exactly the logic of representation that the activist decision-making structures I was trying to describe were trying hardest to avoid. Even more, to place too much of a narrative framework on events would necessarily obscure the actual experience of direct actions, in which one spends months preparing events that one hopes could be narrated in certain ways, passes through a brief flurry of action in which one has very little idea what is going on, and then, ultimately, spends weeks trying to figure out what happened and arguing about how the story should, in fact, be told. I hope I have come up with a reasonable compromise, a story that is at the same time readable, publishable, and at least somewhat true to the integrity of its object.

I also hope the results will live up to the best tradition of ethnography—an attempt to describe, and to capture something of the texture and richness and underlying sense of a way of being and doing that could not otherwise be captured in writing. I also hope that, in doing so, I can offer the reader a glimpse of one small, North American fraction of a much larger, growing global social movement whose existence many are not even really aware of.

CHAPTER 1:

NEW YORK DIARY: MARCH 2001

When the CLAC caravan came through, most of us in New York had been locked in a prolonged debate over whether we should be trying to get to Québec at all. At the time, the NYC Direct Action Network was concentrating its efforts on helping to organize a mass "convergence" of activists in Burlington, to run for several days leading up to the action. There everyone would hold a spokescouncil to decide what to do next. Ya Basta! had largely been left to come up with action scenarios. The problem was that there was little reason to believe that several dozen known activists loaded down with gas masks, helmets, padding, and chemical jumpsuits were ever going to be allowed across the border. That meant we either had to forgo the gear or send it to Canada well in advance—neither of which, for various reasons, were particularly plausible alternatives. Faced with a similar dilemma during the World Economic Forum protests in Geneva, Italian Ya Basta! had carried out their actions at the border itself.

For a lot of us, that made a lot of sense. All along, we had been concentrating on immigration issues. We had already appeared, in our colorful costumes, at protests at two different immigration detention facilities in New York. The New York area was particularly full of such facilities. Even in those days before September 11, there were hundreds of asylum-seekers and undocumented aliens locked up in New York, including many asylum-seekers languishing for years under twenty-three-hour lockdown, under conditions considerably worse than for many murderers and rapists. If the ultimate purpose of the international system of immigration and border controls was to lock most of humanity away in places where people in rich countries did not have to think about them, this was its ultimate manifestation: locations where human beings were literally made to vanish. Almost no one in America knew any of this was going on. One idea we were bouncing around was to somehow dramatize the situation, aggressively make the invisible reappear: for instance, to get hold of portraits of some of these detainees, and place them, perhaps along with statements or biographies, on the outside of our shields. We were also aware that the Canadian border post at Champlain, the one Americans normally pass through to travel to Québec, was right next to a very large immigration detention facility of its own. We would demand our rights, as global citizens, to march (in formation) through the border. There was some small possibility we might even get through.

Not all were entirely happy with this plan, or with the idea of any sort of border action. Many thought all this would produce was a media stunt the media wouldn't even cover. "Direct action," one DAN activist argued, in a post to several activist listservs, "is not symbolic!" It's a matter of directly confronting the policy-makers responsible for capitalist globalization, of directly trying to stop their plans. Really, we should be concentrating our efforts on figuring out some way to get into Canada (and how difficult could that really be?).

I was following much of this debate online from New Haven, where I was teaching at Yale three or four days a week. At the time, my activist schedule started with the weekly Ya Basta! meeting on Thursday and ended with the DAN meeting at 6PM Sunday; then I'd take the train up to Connecticut again. It seems to me one way to give the reader a feeling for what an activist life is like would be to simply go through my notes, and give some indications of the meetings I attended during the weeks following the CLAC caravan's visit. As will soon become apparent, there are reasons these are particularly good weeks to start from. What follows will be something like a diary, and draws extensively on the diary-like notes I did keep at the time—though very much rewritten. It will also contain some much more literal extracts from my field notes.

Thursday, March 1, 2001

Ya Basta! formation training, Manhattan, 7PM

Every other week, instead of meetings, Ya Basta! would hold what we called "formation trainings." These were held at a dance studio in Chelsea, made available to us by a member of the collective named Betty. Betty was a dancer and choreographer, at that time known around the New York art scene for her unique brand of shadow-dancing. She had first got drawn into activism after the electoral fiasco in Florida in 2000, fell in with the Ya Basta! crew in the bus heading down to the inaugural protests in Washington. She later explained she was attracted mainly to Ya Basta!'s theatrical, performative aspect—though she soon became a stalwart of NYC DAN as well.

The training was attended by maybe twenty people.

I should point out the term "training" is being used here very loosely, since none of us, except arguably Betty herself, really had enough experience to "train" anyone. Moose had been to Italy and seen real Ya Basta! tactics and equipment, but he'd never participated in any actions. Betty, as a dance instructor, knew a great deal about how bodies move around in space, but was new to the world of direct action. The rest of us were basically making it up as we went along. Some members of the collective had been studying ancient defensive warfare techniques involving shield walls and the like, or exchanging ideas with other collectives around the country working on similar experiments. One had recently found a pamphlet on shield tactics put together by an anarchist collective somewhere in the Midwest and posted it on our listserv (which was to have unanticipated effects later on, since the listserv was, like most activist listservs, monitored by the police). One sometime member had once been part of the Society for Creative Anachronism, and knew something about armor. Still, the question of who was "training" whom was always somewhat arbitrary: the role seemed to devolve mainly on the self-important. Not that anyone made much of an issue of it at that point because everything was so obviously all in good fun. "Trainings" were mainly just a chance to put on chemical suits and improvised padding, don the shields we had begun to put together from ashcan-shaped orange highway markers (the big plastic ones—if you cut them in half, they make two perfect three-foot shields), and bash each other about with padded sticks.

It was also a chance to debut new gear and toys. Two weeks ago, someone had come with a box full of cheap Israeli gas masks he acquired through a mail order house. This week I bring a box of kazoos (we had been talking, on and off, about the possibility of creating a Ya Basta! kazoo section). Emma immediately starts serenading us with her rendition of "I Fought the Law and the Law Won."

"Not necessarily the most inspiring tune to have chosen."

"Well, someone did a version called 'I Fought the Law and I Won,' but the music is the same."

We have a long discussion of possible larger-scale tactics. One idea that has been floating around forever has been that of some kind of donut gun. The joke goes back to the days before the Republican National Convention in Philly, in 2000, when a newspaper reported that police commanders had been warning street cops not to accept any food protesters might "offer to try to win them over to their side." One affinity group found this so amusing that they actually proposed setting up a table completely covered in doughnuts, with a sign saying "Police: Join Us and All This Could Be Yours!" The table never materialized. But a lot of us in Ya Basta! felt that purely defensive tactics seemed just a bit limiting. If they're shooting plastic bullets and tear gas at you, you want to shoot something back—just not anything that could possibly be construed as harmful. Something ridiculous, absurd, but which nonetheless implied that, if this were a battle, we'd be giving as good as we got. Donuts did seem the most obvious choice of projectile. We puzzled over possibilities for how to deliver them: would it be a catapult (echoing the ancient/medieval theme)? Or more of a slingshot-type arrangement? Someone had dumpster-dived a gigantic tube and some kind of huge rubber band and brought it to the formation training but we all concluded we would have to consult with someone who actually knew something about engineering.

Anyway, the training was the fun part. Afterwards we'd have a brief formal meeting, and that was always something of a letdown. It was not only because we first got all sweaty and exhilarated and then had to sit on the ground for an hour and talk. It was also because two or three people tended to do all the talking. From the start, Ya Basta! meetings had mostly consisted of a prolonged conversation between three activists: Moose, who was in his twenties, and a slightly older married couple named Smokey and Flamma. Some had specific roles: Laura and I, for instance, constituted the propaganda and media group. But, mostly, the rest of us were relegated to throwing in occasional comments or questions. All this was partly due to the group's unusual make-up. Moose had come out of DAN, a group that took meeting dynamics extremely seriously. DAN employed a formal consensus process with rotating facilitators, an elaborate system of "stacking" designed to ensure no small group of voices dominated the conversation. Smokey and Flamma hated DAN. Like a number of other anarchists in New York—I'll call them the "hardcores," for lack of a better name, the sort that were likely to have more experience in Black Blocs, tree sits, or the squatter scene, or anyway used to working in small, intimate collectives—they saw DAN's formal structure as itself stifling and oppressive. Since Ya Basta! meetings, unlike trainings, rarely involved more than a dozen people, there didn't seem to be too much need for formal process anyway. Usually Moose acted as de facto facilitator. This itself would have been a cardinal sin in formal consensus process, since it's a basic principle that those intending to bring forward proposals at a meeting should never also be running it (in formal meetings, facilitators should try to avoid expressing opinions at all). Since Ya Basta! had originally been Moose's idea, he normally did bring most of the proposals. At the time, though, none of us saw this as much of a problem—though it did make meetings rather tiresome.

The reason we didn't see it as problem was because NYC Ya Basta! was still a new group. It's not unusual for new activist groups to emerge from one person's vision, and for the first few months, for one or two people to do almost all the coordinative work. Still, this cannot last forever. If the group is to become a real, sustainable collective, there inevitably comes a point where the other members take ownership. Participants start asking "why is it always the same person leading the meeting? Why is the facilitator also the one presenting all the proposals?" There follows a kind of peasant insurrection and, if the collective doesn't dissolve in bitter recriminations, it becomes a genuinely democratic group.

In Ya Basta!, this was an open question, because, somewhat unusually, there were two foci of imaginative energy: Moose on one side, Smokey and Flamma on the other. One might think of them as different tendencies, perhaps, the DAN types versus the hardcores.[1] At the time, the situation fascinated me because I couldn't find any sociological basis for the split: in terms of class background or trajectory, ethnicity or educational background, the two groups were indistinguishable. It was purely a difference in philosophy.

The question is of course what would happen when the peasant insurrection actually arrived.

In recent weeks, at least, meetings had started to become more interesting. Two weeks earlier, Mac, one of the Canadians in New York DAN, had come to the training to urge us to consider an alternative to Champlain: a border action at Cornwall, on a bridge in the middle of the Akwesasne Mohawk reservation. Mac was in contact with an old friend, a member of the Mohawk Warrior Society on the Canadian side, who was very enthusiastic about using the FTAA mobilization to make an issue of the fact that the US-Canadian border ran right down the middle of Mohawk lands. Despite the fact that both the US and Canada recognized their territory as sovereign by treaty, local people had to pass through an international border, and submit themselves to customs, just to visit their relatives on the other side. The Cornwall idea had an obvious appeal—especially since Mac thought he could line up a number of Canadian trade unionists to support us on the other side—but it meant abandoning the whole immigration detention issue that we'd been focusing on. It also seemed just a little too good to be true. At the first meeting we consensed to stick with Champlain. The next day, several people thought better of it and we decided, over the listserv, to postpone a decision until the next meeting. The final decision had been to investigate further; so today's meeting was largely devoted to putting together a group of volunteers to go up to Cornwall over the weekend and check things out for themselves. Shawn, Mac's contact there, was already getting together some fellow Warriors for the meeting. Moose had already found a car.

Saturday, March 3

Meeting with Mohawks

Actually, we ended up with two cars, since a couple of people from Philadelphia had driven up as well. In addition, we had Moose, Smokey and Flamma, with Mac representing DAN, and a couple of local anarchists currently living in the Independent Media Center (IMC). They were to set out on Saturday morning.

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[1] Though reality is always more complicated: for instance, there were also a fair number of people who first got involved in activism from Ya Basta! itself, one Italian, and various other unclassifiables.

I was supposed to be going too, but a family medical crisis forced me to drop out. Two carloads of activists set out around 9AM. One car broke down in the Holland Tunnel and everyone had to flip coins to see who would continue on.

That evening the following report appeared over the Internet:

> Representatives of NYC DAN, NYC Ya Basta!, IMC NYC, Philly Direct Action Working Group and the People's Law Collective met in Cornwall on Saturday with Tyendinaga Mohawks, Members of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), and the Guelph Direct Action Group and the People's Community Union (PCU) in Kingston.
>
> The Mohawks announced that they were prepared to open the border at Cornwall to activists wishing to pass into Canada on April 19, so that the latter can join a caravan to Québec City already being organized by activists in Kingston.
>
> The Mohawks intend this "Day of Rage" as an assertion of sovereignty, since the bridge crossing this border is on Mohawk Land. Currently, Mohawks allow use of the crossing 364 days a year, and open it once a year to assert sovereignty.
>
> This information has since been taken back to the groups in question and submitted to their own process of democratic decision-making. So far, NYC-DAN, NYC-Ya Basta!, and several traditional Mohawk houses have publicly declared their support for this action.

When I read this at the time it seemed a bit opaque. Things became clearer at the DAN meeting the next day. Let me give a fuller account that particular meeting, since it was one of the more interesting I attended.

Sunday, March 4

DAN meeting, Charas El Bohio Cultural Center, 6PM

We met in our usual room at Charas, an activist social center in the Lower East Side. The meeting started small: perhaps ten or twelve of us, though over the next hour or so a lot more drifted in, until, at its height, there were twenty-five or thirty. That day, we also had no less than three foreign visitors: Mike and Corey from SalAMI, and Olivier de Marcellus, who worked with Peoples' Global Action in Switzerland. The SalAMI people were on an eleven-day American tour, giving action trainings in cities across the Northeast. They were being hosted largely by the International Socialist Organization (ISO), and were accompanied by a local ISO organizer. Olivier just happened to be in town.

Nicky and Betty facilitated. I volunteered to take minutes.

Unlike Ya Basta!, DAN meetings had an explicit formal process. They always began the same way. First, we put together an agenda. There was always a skeleton agenda already written on the wall, but everyone had the opportunity to add new items, and then we allocated time for each of them: five minutes for one, fifteen for another, one or two very minor announcements. Mike and Corey had to leave early so we put them up first.

I think everyone was at least a bit curious about Mike and Corey because until now we'd all been dealing only with CLAC, and hearing about the SalAMI folk only second-hand as the irritating pacifists. Most of us were curious what they'd actually be like. As it turned out, both young men were quite well-groomed in button-down shirts and dockers—pleasant-looking fellows who spoke with a slight French accent.

They both stood up. Mike explained that SalAMI had been organizing in Québec City for three years now, but since word had got out about the security fence, they had determined that they weren't going to be purely reactive and face the enemy on their own terms. So, instead of Québec, they were planning an action in Ottawa, the Canadian capital. The key issue, he explained, was that all the negotiations around the FTAA were being conducted in secret. Apparently, after the failure of WTO talks in Seattle, the US trade negotiators had decided their big mistake had been to give the public some idea what it was they were negotiating. This time they weren't going to make the same mistake. None of the drafts or any information about what was in them was being released to the public—though all this information was being made available to corporations like McDonald's, Monsanto, and Citibank.

> Mike: The idea is that on April 1st, we'll organize a mass demo in Ottawa. We've reserved three rooms in Parliament to put the FTAA on trial…
>
> Someone: Wait a minute—you managed to reserve rooms in *Parliament*?
>
> Corey: Well, it was one of our labor union allies that made the actual reservations.
>
> Majeed: Remember, Canada is a different country. Unions actually have some rights there.
>
> Mike: …also, we're going to invite anyone working on FTAA projects to let us drill them there, so the next day, the 2nd, we can conduct a nonviolent CD—a blockade of the Foreign Affairs and Trade offices. We're going to do what we call a "search and seizure" action, go in, in search of the text. We've announced we're going to do this if they don't release the text by March 20th. Of course, in order to pull it off, we'll need lots of help, to raise media awareness.

Various details followed on attempts to get folksinger Ani DiFranco's support and possible participation, the media blackout on the FTAA in the US (though coverage was pretty decent in Canada), and other issues. Majeed asked about diversity of tactics.

> Mike: Well, obviously we would never turn people over to police, like some emails have been saying. And, if you're talking about our earlier guidelines, with the rules against masks and whatnot: no, we've gotten rid of those. But when we hear the phrase "diversity of tactics"—well, that sounds to us like a euphemism for "free-for-all."
>
> SalAMI has been putting together what we call a "convergence table," with over thirty different groups, including unions and student and church groups that the CLAC would never be able to reach. That's what we consider *real* diversity. But it's necessarily based on a principle of nonviolent action; these groups would never even be talking to us if they thought we'd ask them to endorse an action with no parameters at all.
>
> Corey: As for CLAC… Sure, there are leadership issues. And alpha male issues. But we're still trying to pull things together. Our Creative Action Training is meant for both sides, and we hope that, when the action finally happens, we won't have two different spokescouncils. If we can at least agree on no molotov cocktails, we can have a single spokescouncil. Otherwise, well, we're just playing to a fraction of one percent of the movement in my own personal opinion.
>
> Mike: I'll leave my email.
>
> Corey: Tomorrow we're having a training at NYU, at 7PM, Help spread word!
>
> Brooke: Actually, I should probably point out that DAN represents a diversity of opinion and our Continental DAN principles are actually sort of vague on the nonviolence issue. I think intentionally so. The exact wording is DAN calls for "nonviolent civil disobedience and direct action." So we support both. LA DAN is pretty strictly nonviolent. CLAC is trying to get on the CDAN call and it would be good for you guys to also hook into that too.
>
> Mike: These are not easy questions, but I think it'll all work out (*laughs*) and Québec will be amazing. It might not be all smiles and hugging each other, but when push comes to shove, we're all in this together.
>
> Zoe: How long will it be before the barbed wire fence goes up?
>
> Mike: Well, most of the concrete was already laid down before the ground froze. But that's just the base. Apparently it will be four kilometers around—that's a 2.5 mile perimeter—surrounding a section of the city with 25,000 residents. They're all going to be receiving special cards which will authorize them to move in and out. There's been some effort to encourage people to refuse or even better—this was my suggestion—burn them.
>
> SP: What about people who work in there?

> Mike: I'm not sure how they're handling that. Presumably they'll be getting some kind of ID too.
>
> Majeed: I have a question. CLAC and CASA (Comité d'accueil du Sommet des Amériques) are explicitly anti-capitalist. What about SalAMI?
>
> Mike: Well, yes, I think you could say we are. Myself personally, I don't like to use the word 'capitalism' because it turns some people off. We've taken a common ground approach, but in order to promote a radical alternative vision—right now we have a committee working on mapping some of that out. Certainly you can assume all the basics: we're anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchy, anti-homophobia.
>
> Corey: You have to understand this is going to be one of the largest security actions in history. We decided early on that a Seattle-style shutdown is highly improbable. We're not going to stop the Summit from happening. So the question when it comes to the wall was: how can we come up with a model for what might be considered a win? What would give us the right to declare victory? People are working on it. One women's group sent out a call to weave images and slogans of resistance into the fence itself. This would be powerful for the media, but wouldn't please everyone, certainly. So then what? Target the airports? Do a blockade, close off the gates, and piss off all the residents? This is why we're calling for a strategic spokescouncil, to make our tactics square with our strategic aims. What's really important is how our actions effect the public, what they'll do in terms of constructing long-term alliances…

Olivier remarks, in a soft, very dignified voice, that all this sounds very similar to what happened in Davos during the World Economic Forum protests the month before. The police overreacted and were stopping people miles away from the actual meetings. The repression was so brutal—they were sending police out into the fields to gather cowshit to mix with the water in their water-cannons—that it backfired, causing a huge public backlash and complete victory for us. By the end, when there was a little riot in Geneva (they set fire to several banks), polls actually showed the public were still more supportive of the protesters than the government. And this is in Switzerland!

The SalAMI folk are skeptical. "You can try to go through the wall if you like," says Mike. "But you have to bear in mind there's going to be eight thousand cops, five hundred Darth Vaders you'd have to outrun if you actually did get in. That's why we decided our strategy during the Summit itself will be not to approach the wall at all, but to establish what we're calling the "Freedom and Truth Areas of the Americas," maybe a kilometer away. SalAMI wants to maintain this as a truly liberated zone, and you know" (significant glance at the Yabbas in the room), "there's real room for Ya Basta! tactics to keep the cops out of it."

Mike and Corey have to run off for a training at NYU. They leave with their ISO chaperone and the meeting carries on.

Next up is Lesley's report-back from the Mohawk trip—which, she says, went very well indeed. The seven or eight people who made it to Cornwall had met not only with members of the Mohawk Warrior Society but also members of the Kingston Labor Council on the Canadian side ("along with a couple guys from Guelph who we're calling 'the Guelph Action Network'"). The Mohawks pledged to open the border to demonstrate their control over the land in Akwesasne. Shawn, their main spokesman, was framing the action as a "day of rage" over the division of their land and both governments' trampling of treaty rights. The Warriors were hinting at very militant tactics, talking of opening the bridge "by any means necessary"—all of which, Lesley remarks, is really something of a bluff, but it could put the Canadian government in an extremely delicate position as they really would not want to use too much force on Mohawk lands. That really would unify the community against them. In fact, they did not expect any significant opposition: the Warriors actually had been in the habit of seizing the bridge one day a year, for the last few years, as an assertion of sovereignty, and the government had never made any effort to stop them. Canadian auto and postal workers were already planning a caravan from Toronto and Kingston to Québec City; they'd be happy to be there on the other side of the border to support us. "Oh yes," she added, "and the District Labor Council says they will serve tea."

All sorts of radical ideas were being bounced around. Some Canadians were talking about the possibility of taking over the locks of the St. Lawrence, to close down shipping traffic. But there was also a word of caution. "Bear in mind Akwesasne itself is a very fragmented, very divided community. They had their own little civil war over there in the 1980s over plans to build a casino. The people we're dealing with are from the Warrior Houses (who were against the casino); they're with us, even if everyone in these communities is hardly unanimous."

I ask how much of this was to go in the minutes—which are posted to an open-subscription listserv. "In fact, the Mohawks told us specifically they *want* this information to be made public, especially the phrase: 'Mohawk Warriors calling for Days of Rage.'"

Lesley's report-back is followed by a number of other announcements: of a benefit for Casa del Sol, a squat in the Bronx; upcoming court dates for the Esperanza Garden defendants (they had been arrested defending a community garden from bulldozers some months before); a reminder of puppet-making every Saturday afternoon for the More Gardens! group. There were also report-backs from various DAN working groups: Labor, Police and Prisons, Legal; the WBAI campaign; the Web team; the Women's Caucus. Brooke announced that Continental DAN (CDAN) had received a request from some people in Santa

Cruz to join the CDAN network. ("Probably a bunch of hippies and deadheads, but we love them anyway.") There is also a report from the newly created Banner Working Group, which seems to consist of two decidedly crusty looking individuals in black hooded sweatshirts, who unveil a beautiful banner that one of them had painted for DAN to carry during marches.

Next comes New Business. The first item on the agenda is the Burlington Convergence. This, Brooke explained, is beginning to turn into a problem. The original idea had been to provide a place for people to start gathering on Monday April 16, so as to proceed to the border Thursday and ideally make it to Québec in time for the CLAC "Carnival Against Capitalism" parade on Friday the 20th. That way, there would be several days for everyone to hold trainings, educational events, and spokescouncils. However, at the moment we had just four or five people in Vermont trying to organize everything. Also, the event was technically being organized through NEGAN, the "New England Global Action Network." In principle, NEGAN was the local equivalent to DAN—but unfortunately, it was top-heavy with "anti-corporate" types, liberal reformers, Greens, and socialist groups—notably the ISO. The ISO had its own agenda and it appeared to have little overlap with ours.

Some background is required here. The ISO is one of the few of the innumerable Trotskyist sects that were founded and split from one another over the course of the 1960s and 1970s that had managed to survive and even expand in the intervening years. It had done so because, unlike the others, the ISO did not concentrate its recruiting efforts in factories but on college campuses. In 2001, the ISO was, in many ways, the anarchist nemesis—particularly, DAN's. This was in part because they were trying to do similar things via radically different methods. Both were revolutionary anti-capitalists. Both believed in working within broad coalitions and trying to encourage them in more radical directions. The problem was that for the ISO, this was a very long-term process, and in the meantime they were mainly interested in numbers. They were always trying to put together the broadest coalitions possible, which meant wooing the leadership of unions and mainstream NGOs, who would, in turn, almost invariably want guarantees against violence or, often, against direct action of any kind. From the anarchist perspective, this was like trying to put an army of a hundred thousand people in the field, but only on condition that none of them actually do anything.

It would not have been nearly so annoying if the ISO were simply opposed to direct action. Then one could just ignore them. Their members attended spokescouncils and, often, took part in actions themselves. Hence, they were the ones at the spokes always trying to talk everyone into ratcheting things down, turning a plan for militant direct action into an act of strictly nonviolent civil disobedience, turning a plan for nonviolent civil disobedience into a unpermitted march, turning a unpermitted march into a permitted one. The strategy of seeking the largest possible coalition ensured they tended to be chary even of groups that put out too radical a message: it became a kind of running gag among anarchists that if you label an organization "anti-capitalist," you can guarantee the socialists won't show up. Finally, groups like the ISO were explicitly vanguardist. They saw themselves as having the correct analysis of the world situation. When they did get involve in broader coalitions, it only made sense that they should provide direction and leadership.

Anarchists, in contrast, tend to refer to their strategy as "contaminationist." The assumption is that direct action and direct democracy are infectious; almost anyone exposed to them is likely to be transformed by the experience. Anyway the point is not to organize people but to encourage them to organize themselves. Rather than making deals with labor bureaucrats, then, groups like CLAC or DAN tried to appeal directly to the rank and file. Rather than try to take over large organizations, they aimed to create dramatic models of self-organization that others might be inspired to imitate, if, inevitably, it was assumed, in their own idiosyncratic ways.

All this no doubt makes it easier to see why the SalAMI tour was being sponsored by the ISO, and why Mike and Corey came, and left, escorted by an ISO chaperone.

To return to NEGAN then…

The week before, Moose and Marina, a longstanding DAN activist (and former ISO member), had gone up to a NEGAN meeting in Worcester, Massachusetts. Neither were at the DAN meeting today—they had come back with the flu—but everyone knew what happened. The meeting was full of ISO people, who insisted on creating a steering committee, and pushed for majority voting instead of consensus. (One cannot, after all, attempt to pack a steering committee that does not operate by majority vote.) They also proposed that NEGAN concentrate on organizing buses to go up to Québec City on Saturday, so they could work with the labor unions that were going to be bussing their people to the march that day. They argued that this would make it much easier to get through the border. It would also, however, mean completely skipping the day of direct action scheduled for the day before. It was all an enormous problem because the logical thing should have been for DAN to throw all its resources into the Burlington Convergence—organizing spokescouncils and the like was, after all, what we did best. But it looked like the anarchists were simply being bypassed:

> Brooke: I have a lot of names of people up there [in Burlington], but… I hope I don't insult anyone by saying this but: Burlington used to have a Direct Action group. But it was overrun by ISOs and socialist types. Biella and the

> Native Forest Networks are more anarchist—the former is one woman who's doing most of the organizing for the convergence basically single-handedly. I'm trying hard to get the Institute for Social Ecology involved (which they will if they know what's good for them), but so far they haven't done much either, so for the moment things are really not in good shape up there.
>
> Majeed: You know, I don't mean to be vulgar or sectarian, but I say, "fuck the ISO."
>
> David: Um, should I put that in the notes?
>
> Majeed: Actually, yeah. Put it in the notes.
>
> Brooke: Bear in mind there are people reading the notes as far away as California.
>
> Majeed: Whatever. Frankly, I'm just sick of those guys. The moment there's the slightest illusion of being in a position of power they take over and immediately cut off all debate. They've been doing this since at least the Gulf War. I say let's just contact the "authentic elements."
>
> David: (*still scribbling*) "Authentic elements?"
>
> Majeed: You know: people who are doing this because they want the mobilization to succeed, not to further some fucking organizational imperative.

Majeed, a former member of the Iranian Communist Party (which he explained to us was largely Kurdish), now active in DAN Labor, had, since becoming an anarchist, become unusually impatient with vanguardists.

After renewing our determination to help out with "authentic elements" in Burlington, we talk a little about the next scheduled weekly meeting. As it happens, this falls at the same time as a Critical Resistance protest against the Horizon Center, a juvenile detention center in Midtown. Someone suggests: Why don't we all go to the rally and, if there's any urgent business that needs to be discussed, we can do it on the subway platform where everyone is supposed to be assembling anyway? Everyone agrees, though Brooke is careful to insist we post it to the list immediately and prominently.

The end of the meeting is quite unusual. Technically, there was an option at the end of every DAN meeting to hold an "educational session." I don't think we ever had. But everyone is anxious to learn about Peoples' Global Action. We had all heard of PGA—in fact, DAN was in a certain sense modeled on it—but few of us (except for Lesley, who has been studying PGA as a grad student in Columbia) really knew that much about, aside from the fact that it was a global network created by the Zapatistas that put out calls for simultaneous global days of action and, most famously, had originally come up with the idea of a global day of action against the WTO meetings in Seattle. So we asked Olivier—or "Oliver," as he insisted on calling himself—to give us a little background. Olivier is a man who looks to be in his fifties or early sixties, a very aristocratic, European-looking fellow with a truly extraordinary nose. We're rather surprised to learn he's actually an American, a 1960s refugee who fled the country over Vietnam and had been living in Geneva ever since.

EDUCATIONAL SESSION

Olivier: Hello. My name's Oliver de Marcellus, and I'm from Geneva. I've been living there since I left the States in 1968. I've been with PGA since it started in 1998; before that, I was working with the Zapatista movement.

Brooke: We'd really like to hear more about the history.

Olivier Well, you can read more about it on our web page, which is www.agp.org. (That's from the French or Spanish acronym. If you type "pga" it'll send you to the Professional Golf Association.)

About PGA... hmmm. I guess there's two ways of talking about PGA. The easiest is to say, you can be a member of PGA whether you know it or not. Because PGA is nothing but five principles (which are, I believe, DAN's founding principles as well). Well, that, and also, taking part in actions which accord with those principles. So, if you look at it that way the only definition of PGA is "people who agree with the manifesto." By that definition there's millions of people in PGA and most of them don't even know it.

That's the large definition. The smaller definition, which almost doesn't exist, is as an organization. We're not *supposed* to be an organization. We have no funds, no secretariat, no one is qualified to speak for PGA. We do have an International Conveners Committee, with representatives from groups from different continents who are rotated every two years. All this Committee can do is convene international PGA meetings, decide who comes and who from the Global South gets free tickets.

Maggie: How do you define "Global South?"

Olivier: Everywhere but Europe and North America.

At first the Conveners were also supposed to decide on global days of action, but as it turned out it was so hard to get some of them to answer emails and the like, that groups started taking the initiative on their own. So, the way it's worked out is that actions end up being proposed by the most concerned local groups, the call circulates on the Net to everyone involved, and those who are interested take part, those who aren't, ignore it. Which I guess is the most democratic way to go about it. (Usually the actions then end up getting approved five months later by the Conveners Committee, retroactively, but no one really notices.)

For instance, the Geneva demonstrations in 1998 were called by the Conveners. The Reclaim the Streets in England called the J18 demos the year after—they proposed it, and people just started doing it. N30 was the same thing—that was the biggest thing we ever did, but it started just as a call to have an action against the WTO, wherever it met, even before we knew it was going to meet in Seattle. In the case of [the actions against the IMF meetings in] Prague it was the same thing—a local group proposed it, and it was taken up. So I guess that's how we've been doing it since 1999.

Brooke: Could you talk about the upcoming conference?

Olivier: Yes. The International PGA conference is going to be held in Cochabamba from the 17th to the 24th of September, and the call *really will* come out this week (I'm sorry, I know we keep saying it, but it really will this week). We're aiming for two hundred delegates, of whom seventy percent have to be from the South or East; sixty from Western Europe and North America and the rest from the "Global South." The most sizeable contingent will be from Latin America. Right now the epicenter for resistance to globalization is the Andes; that's the vital spot, which is why we're holding it in Bolivia to begin with. Well, obviously of course, because that's the city where there was the huge campaign against Bechtel when they tried to privatize the water system, which was spearheaded by PGA-affiliated groups.

But we're really hoping there won't be a coup before it happens.

Stuart: If they did have a coup, it could hardly make the government any worse.

Olivier: But if the hosts are all in hiding, it will make it very difficult to organize.

Also we're trying to start a more decentralized funding system—which is crucial for getting tickets to the delegates from the South because airfare is just hugely expensive. At the Conveners Meeting in Prague in December, we decided we couldn't keep getting money from foundations because the more effective we become, the fewer foundations will want to give money to us.

Lesley: And what is the money actually used for?

Olivier: Just for the one thing: to fly delegates into the meetings.

[*some discussion follows of DAN's potential involvement in the Cochabamba meetings... We decide we should really put the PGA manifesto on our web page*]

Olivier: That would actually be useful, as one of the functions of the conference is to amend the manifesto. For instance, European delegates will want to make sure something about climate change is put in there as it didn't seem as obviously pressing when we first wrote the thing in 1998.

David: Can you tell us a little about how it all started?

Olivier: Well, PGA was very definitely first conceived as part of the Zapatista movement. You could sort of say it was founded during the Second Intergalactic Zapatista Encuentro in Spain in 1997. That was when the groups that became the backbone of PGA first met: the European anarchists, the Brazilian Landless Peasants Movement, and—actually, probably the most important group of all was the KRRS. That's the Karnataka State Farmers' Association, which is a Gandhian Socialist peasant movement in India which has something like ten million members. They first became famous for their "Cremate Monsanto" campaign in the mid-1990s, where they systematically burned genetically modified crops. Last year KRRS mobilized 51,000 people in bullock carts who tried to seize the port of Bombay—and for them, that was, really, just a medium-size action. In May 1998 they turned 280,000 people for a mass anti-WTO demo. That was probably their biggest. But they work on a colossal scale.

Natalie: You know you should really have all this history stuff on the web page.

Olivier: I know. We should. We probably have the corniest web site in existence; it was probably the first anti-globalization web page, but the design is horrendous.

Stuart: You talk about proposals emerging from local groups—by "local groups" do you just mean "any groups that have endorsed the principles"?

Olivier: Well, another aspect of this non-organizational status is that there's no formal membership. Anyone can propose something.

David: So in theory, we could too?

Olivier: Oh, absolutely. Why not?

But back to the history. PGA had its first meeting in Spain, in 1998, and at that first meeting there were a lot of anarchists from England, like people from Reclaim the Streets-London, active in the anti-roads movement who had no idea similar things were happening on the continent and vice versa. They met the squatters in Italy and Germany, and ideas started to spread. None of us on the Continent, for instance, had ever heard of the idea of a British-style illegal street party. A month later we were organizing one in Geneva. And it was wonderful. Before long, people were organizing them everywhere.

Someone came up with the theory that the result was a kind of global brain: the interconnections of communication are such that you can imagine people not just communicating but acting, and acting damn effectively, without leadership, a secretariat, without even formal information channels. It's a little like ants meeting in an ant-heap, all waving their antennae at each other, and information just gets around—even though there's no chain of command or even hierarchical information structure.

Of course it would be impossible without the Internet.

Someone: Of course, they said that at first about the Zapatistas, too.

Olivier: Actually, it was a little annoying at first how the media used to say how the Zapatistas were simply an Internet phenomenon—annoying, that is, for people who actually know how hard it is to reach them. But in a way it's sort of true. An Internet list by nature can't be authoritarian—you just put out a proposition and people discuss it, those who like it, go do it. If it's not that good a proposal, people will do it less. The one thing you absolutely can't do over the Internet is vote.

Stuart: All this sounds so much like DAN!

Olivier: You know, when I arrived in Seattle for the WTO actions, I didn't even know what DAN was. Then I picked up a DAN leaflet and there were the PGA principles and pictures of Geneva actions inside, and I said, "Oh, it's just PGA." That happens to me all the time. I met someone from PGA Korea last week, and it was: "Really? That exists?" In Prague, there were two busloads of Turks who showed up. It turned out there was a five-city PGA network in Turkey, they'd downloaded our principles from the web page and were going around showing films of Seattle. None of us had the slightest idea until we actually met them. It keeps happening all the time.

Of course, now that there's Indymedia the information gets back to us more than it used to. When the Net-freaks first explained the idea of simultaneous demos to us, we used to try to coordinate it by everyone sending emails to Geneva. It didn't work. But now we outsource it to Indymedia, as it were. So, during the actions in Prague, we had 250 simultaneous demos worldwide, of which 70 were reported on Indymedia. And that, in turn, changes our relation to the corporate media—basically, we don't even need them any more. A few months ago we had an action in Geneva where we occupied the Ecuadorian embassy in solidarity with people holding an action there. After the whole thing was over, we realized we had forgotten to even tell the media about it, because who needs them? It'll get back to the people in Ecuador that we did it through Indymedia, and that's all that was really important to us.

What's happening now is surely the biggest thing since May 1968. At least in Europe. The first time that I've felt such a huge, global upsurge. Prague was just… whoa! There were at least eight different countries that sent contingents of over a thousand people. When we started none of us had any idea how to put together a mass convergence or a spokescouncil, we had to make it all up from scratch. Then, come September: lo and behold! It worked! And we ended up kicking the IMF out of town a day early.

And every meeting had to be coordinated in seven different languages: English, France, German, Turkish, Spanish, Italian, Czech…

Brooke: Jesus!

Olivier: But it worked!

Betty: Could you speak about the actions in Davos, and what lessons we could learn from them for Québec City?

Olivier: Well, on that:

> Unhappily, we appear to represent the biggest threat to the Empire around right now, and they appear to be getting *really* concerned. I'm sorry to say it because really we're just a ridiculous bunch of clowns, but there you are.
>
> In Nice, we thought they'd try to block the frontiers before we even got there, and in fact they did—totally illegally—at least against the Italians who in theory have the same EU passports. They also used interesting divide-and-conquer tactics like providing free trains for the union people, and then trying to beat the shit out of the Autonomous people.
>
> We expected the frontiers to be blocked, and that getting to Davos itself would be impossible; so we said, if we can't get there, we'll do actions and blockades wherever we have to. If we couldn't get further than the bottom of the valley where the train meets the highway, below the ski resort where the meetings was actually being held, then fine, we'd block the auto routes there. Or if we can't get into the country, if they try to close the border, we'd close the border ourselves. We ended up having demos in all three, which was great—five hundred Italians stopped at the border blocked the highway there, five hundred other people snuck into Davos itself, which was great, and there were something like five different groups in the valley bottom… It was a *total victory*, despite the biggest security mobilization in Swiss history, with tanks and barbed wire everywhere, blasting us with water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets the moment we'd even appear—even when it was just a bunch of silly floats and people dressed up on stilts or in Ronald McDonald costumes. In the end, they overdid it so much even the highly bourgeois Swiss public was on our side. Several cantons voted to remove the federal police from their territory, the president ended up making a fool of himself at the press conference that night because he wanted to talk about the deliberations in Davos, and kept snapping at the reporters, "Why do you keep asking about the demonstrations?"
>
> Natalie: Were there any arrests?
>
> Olivier: Oh yes. But they had to let them out quickly.
>
> So as far as the FTAA is concerned—there's no reason not to block them in, even if there is this enormous security fence, there still have to be gates. Any place you can block them, the point is made…

We go on talking for some time, about the problems of coordinating with groups with little or no Internet access, about the amazing PGA group called the "Network of Free Black Communities of South America," founded by escaped slaves in the nineteenth century, about a dozen other things. By the time we headed off to a nearby coffee shop to continue the conversation, it was already almost 11PM.

Tuesday, March 6

FTAA Coalition meeting, 8PM

Actually I missed this one (along with the DAN Labor meeting held at the same time), but I heard what happened.

The FTAA Coalition is a broad, New York-wide group which includes DAN, the Greens, the ISO, and various independent activists organizing for Québec City. So when Moose and Marina finally emerged from their sickbeds to give their report-back from the NEGAN meeting, they had to be relatively circumspect. Apparently there was also some ambiguity about the degree to which the Mohawks on the US side are really on board, since we had only been talking to Canadian ones so far. There was some kind of process going on among the Warrior Houses on the American side and no one was quite sure how things would turn out. There were also increasing tensions about the structure of the coalition itself.

Thursday, March 8

Ya Basta! meeting, Manhattan, 7PM[2]

A much better meeting than usual, held at Aladdin's apartment in a public housing development in Chelsea. There were about twenty people. This time, the meeting was even facilitated: informally, but well. Even more unusual, everything was captured on videotape.

There's a long story behind this, but the short version is that there was a young filmmaker named Sasha who had contacted people in the activist community because he wanted to make a documentary. His idea was to contrast standard media images of scary masked anarchists with portraits of the real human beings behind the masks. He soon became involved in Ya Basta! and within a month or two had become effectively part of the group. No one had much trouble with that. But this was the first time he had actually shot a meeting. Actually, it's the first I know of anyone shooting a meeting of any such group at all—in part, he got away with it only because he promised not to show anybody's faces, always keeping his camera pointed low. One or two members actually wore masks for the meeting, mainly, I suspected, for dramatic effect.

Anyway, as meetings went, it turned out to be an excellent choice.

There was already a small crisis brewing with the Mohawk action, due to premature publicity. While Shawn, our main ally, had specifically asked for us to use the words "Days of Rage," and while a piece had immediately come out in a local magazine called *Eye News*, quoting him as saying that they would seize the bridge "by all means necessary" and showing pictures of masked Mohawk Warriors with machine guns from the Oka occupation in Québec in the 1980s, all this was something in the nature of a bluff. Shawn was calculating that, after the trauma of the near-insurrection and long standoff with the Canadian government over Oka in the 1980s, and a previous near-civil war in Akwesasne itself, the Canadian government would not risk sending a large military contingent if they thought real conflict was likely.

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[2] The reader will note that some of these entries are written in the present tense, some in the past. Basically the logic is this: when an account is taken relatively directly from my notes, and contains long excerpts of actual dialogue, it tends to be narrated in the present tense. When the narrative is reconstructed ex post facto, based on accounts of notes, I tend to adopt the past tense. In some entries, the tense shifts from past tense, when describing the background or even giving an account of the early part of a meeting, to present, when the narrative becomes more immediate and follows the notes in a blow-by-blow fashion.

What Moose was really worried about was premature publicity. Specifically, about a dispatch sent out by the two independent, IMC anarchists who had come along on the trip, Target and Warcry. Both were in their own way minor legends in the movement. Target was a punky kid famous for his Black Bloc exploits, who seemed to change his name every other week. Warcry, born in India, was a former tree-sitter, eco-activist, and independent journalist, who then had a reputation as a kind of anarchist poster girl, prominently featured in just about every movie about Seattle—partly owing to charisma, partly because she was one of the few Black Bloc anarchists willing to give interviews. On their return from Canada, they had immediately posted a call of their own that was forwarded to a series of anarchist listservs. In it—at least according to Moose—they had grossly misrepresented what was going on as an ultra-militant armed event and urging anarchists to participate. Apart from being childish, Moose stressed, this was completely out of process: we'd promised not to say anything we weren't specifically authorized to say. He said we'll be talking to Warcry later to see if they can't post some kind of correction, or at least milder version.

Actually, some people were growing concerned with the whole situation. What's up with the picture of the Mohawk Warrior with the M16? Are these guys really going to be carrying guns? Moose assured us they wouldn't. At Oka, they occupied a bridge for two months before they even started carrying guns, and even then they never used them on anyone, even when the police fired on them. It's all a bit of a ploy, he told us. People who lack the privilege of white activists are not in a position of being able to claim to be doing nonviolent action even when, in fact, they are.

Moose also says Shawn has been assuring us that getting through at the bridge will not be a problem, anyway. The problem is more likely to be roadblocks on the way.

So we formally consense on our support for the Cornwall action. Then, after yet another report on NEGAN, we start talking about the larger, New York-wide anti-FTAA Coalition, which actually is experiencing similar problems. The coalition is top-heavy with Greens and ISO people, and organizational tensions have become such that we've agreed to a special meeting on Friday just to sort things out. ("Marina is going. She's the process queen," observes Moose. She's also a one-time ISO member turned anarchist who presumably knows how such people think.)

The big news is that CLAC is having a "consulta," or spokescouncil in Québec City on the 23rd, and Ya Basta! needs to send representatives—especially since during the last consulta, our people didn't make it through. I volunteer. So does Emma, an artist currently working in a health food store on the Lower East Side. Emma points out she might not be an ideal choice, since, while part of the collective, she doesn't intend to do Ya Basta!, but is going to be with the Black Bloc. No one seems to mind.

The selection of delegates is not as delicate a matter as it might be because spokes are not, technically, empowered to make decisions for the group. They're not really representatives. They are basically conduits for information: they explain what their group is intending to do, bring proposals, and convey information and proposals back to the group for it to consider collectively. (In a proper spokescouncil, where the other members of the affinity group are actually present in the room, this can happen on the spot. At a consulta where they aren't, the number of decisions that can be made is much more limited.) Still, this raises the question: what is Ya Basta! in fact planning to do, if we do get through to Québec City? For the rest of the meeting, we consider the possibilities. Since no one is much interested in the idea of protecting SalAMI's autonomous zone in the middle of nowhere, these come down to: (1) helping pull down the wall, (2) trying to get through the wall and enter the perimeter, or (3) providing some sort of diversion—since one thing we do know is that if you do dress up in bright padded outfits, the police will definitely follow you around. The wall is an obvious symbol of the hypocrisy of neoliberalism, but some of us find it a little too symbolic. On the other hand, if we could get inside the perimeter, what would we do there? Smokey had heard a story about a homeless shelter there that effectively had to close down operations because of the Summit—perhaps we could get them to formally invite us to provide security? Someone else had been pursuing the idea of dramatizing the fates of disappeared asylum-seekers: the Coalition for the Defense of the Rights of Immigrants had suggested we might think about placing not their pictures, but a series of specific demands on shields and banners and delivering them to the Summit. But to whom? And how to air them? The US media would never cover the story.

This led to a long debate on the pros and cons of an action against the media itself. Would it be possible, for instance, to shut down the media tent outside the summit building, or even demand they play some tape containing the voices of those frozen out of debate? All agree that the corporate media is a legitimate target, but how would an action against it be effective? What would constitute success? This is the basic question we come up with over and over again in planning for an action: how do we frame the event in such a way that we have the right to declare victory afterwards? And in the case of the media it was particularly acute: even if you did carry out a successful action against the media, who would know?

We don't come to any decisions. Anyway, as a few people point out, we're just one collective. Other Ya Basta! groups will be joining at Burlington and we don't want to make decisions for them. We can save that for the Burlington spokes. But by the time the meeting is over both Emma and I have a fairly clear idea of what we're going to say.

A final announcement. Moose says: "I'm supposed to tell people that Starhawk is going to be in town tomorrow." (He pronounces it with a note of mild mockery: Staaaarhawk.) "I mean, me, I'm not too down with this kind of superstar celebrity bullshit, but she apparently wants to meet some of the New York Ya Basta! Collective so I figured I would pass it on."

Friday, March 9

Coalition structure meeting at Amsterdam Pizza at 111th Street, 6:30PM

This meeting consisted of maybe twenty activists ranged around a table in the back of a pizza joint pretending that they weren't having an argument.

What is now called the FTAA Coalition began as a Direct Action Network working group. DAN had a general meeting every Sunday, and a whole series of working group meetings on other days of the week. Some of these working groups are structural (legal, media, outreach) , some are engaged in ongoing campaigns (DAN Labor, Police & Prisons) but there are always some that are just created to work on some specific action: whether the IMF protests in Washington, the Republican convention in Philly, and now, the FTAA in Québec. Often, these latter working groups themselves could start looking like miniature versions of DAN, with their own working groups to handle outreach, communications, transportation, and the like. They became like cellular structures budding off and then reproducing the same internal relation between the parts. We could afford to be flexible because after all, there was no fixed, top-down chain of command; initiatives were supposed to rise from below anyway; so everyone was free to improvise whatever organizational form seemed to work for them.

The problems came when DAN tried to work with members of groups with profoundly different organizational imperatives. I've already mentioned the great DAN bugaboo, the ISO. The ISO had become involved in DAN-style politics only recently. They had played little or no part in Seattle. Sometime afterwards, however, they apparently received orders from central command in England to get involved with the global justice movement. Suddenly, all sorts of high-ranking ISO organizers started appearing at DAN meetings. Their enthusiasm seemed to ebb and flow. They had participated enthusiastically in the first big NYC-DAN action—A16, the anti-IMF protests in Washington on April 16, 2000—but, after the Republican convention protests in Philly, during which the ISO contingent was widely accused of having abandoned their position and run away, they largely dropped out and threw their energy behind the Nader presidential campaign. Now they were back.

Working groups were in principle open. Anyone could join. In this case, when DAN created a working group for the FTAA mobilization back in January, the ISO folks had suddenly reappeared, along with members of some other groups they had been working with—the Green Party, certain NGOs—who had never, in fact, been to a DAN meeting proper. Since the ISO and Greens, at least, were not there as individuals but as representatives of organizations, the working group in effect became a coalition. So it seemed only reasonable to declare it one and abandon the pretense of its being a part of DAN. This was not a problem since DAN working groups were pretty much autonomous anyway.

So now we had a city-wide coalition which ostensibly worked on anarchist, or anyway directly democratic, principles. In principle, this was just what DAN should have wanted: we were all about disseminating this kind of decision-making model. But there followed an inevitable clash of institutional cultures. The newcomers immediately started treating the coalition like a new organization: they wanted to adopt principles of unity, create outreach literature, and try to get other groups around the city, immigrant groups, labor unions, and the like, to join. The anarchists didn't think of the coalition as a "group" at all. They saw it not as a decision-making body but more of a forum, a way for groups already organizing against the FTAA to exchange information and avoid reduplication of effort. It was something along the lines of a spokescouncil. Certainly they saw no reason for it to adopt an ideological "line" of any sort. For some reason, a lot of the arguments ended up aimed at trying to convince one person: a young woman named Julie, who worked for something called the Urban Justice League. Partly this was because none of us really knew her; she seemed fresh on the scene, but very enthusiastic, active, and eager to learn. Julie, on the other hand, turned out to be a creature of the NGO world, and she ultimately swung decisively to the ISO position. In fact, she soon began acting like a one-woman steering committee of her own, making phone calls to union presidents, pastors, and the leaders of various community groups in our name, and trying to assemble the broadest possible coalition. In theory, this was hard to argue with. But we all knew what was likely to come next: these same groups would start demanding we tone down the direct action, or at least stop talking openly about it. The DAN people and other anarchists responded by forming their own autonomous direct action working group *of* the coalition—calling it, appropriately enough, the "autonomous direct action working group," or AUTODAWG—with its own listserv and separate meetings. AUTODAWG, we decided, would send one representative to the coalition meetings each week, but otherwise we would work together, much like we'd expected the original DAN working group to do.

The problem was that Julie and the ISO people immediately started showing up to all the AUTODAWG meetings too. Technically, of course, there was no reason they couldn't—they were open meetings—but it caused great deal of discomfort on all sides. Julie started complaining on the Internet about exclusion and, before long, everyone agreed we really ought to have a special meeting to discuss process and iron things out.

The result was about twenty people all sitting around a table at a student hangout near Columbia University, sharing out slices of two large cheese pizzas, and trying to be reasonable to one another. Julie offered to facilitate (which probably was not a good idea). It soon became apparent that the main problem was lack of trust in one another's instincts, since, in principle, the ISO side were making some very reasonable points. First of all, they said, consider the new people. There were a lot of new people, especially students, showing up wanting to do direct action. How exactly were they going to plug in and decide what working group they wanted to join if the direct action folk were meeting in an entirely different time and location? Secondly, if one is going to form a coalition that includes labor unions and organized community groups, and you do outreach, they *will* want to see some kind of mission statement. You can't just tell them you're against the FTAA. Of course, the anarchists in the room might have replied by asking what was the point in getting these endorsements anyway: none of these groups were interested in taking part in the action, and any group that might be interested in sending people all the way to Québec to march in the labor parade was almost certainly already making their own arrangements. So, why collect names just to have them on a piece of paper? But no one wanted to preclude the possibility that *some* new group might be pulled in and decide to take a more radical posture. So, instead, we ended up endlessly talking process.

> Julie: For me, there are two issues: First, how do we integrate with the other organizations we're outreaching to? Having them sign on to a mission statement is a tried and true method for doing that. Anyway, people at large, individuals who aren't part of an organization, won't be able to fit into a spokescouncil model. The second is how to avoid reduplication of efforts.
>
> Moose: But the idea of a coalition is not to have an ideology; it's a means for

people with different ideologies or perspectives to work together on an issue.

Green: I want to know what an endorsement would mean in practice. Will unions distribute our flyer to their members? If so, that would facilitate individuals joining, as individuals.

Meredith (ISO): Well, the Outreach Working Group has already decided to write a statement and pass it to us. I guess the question becomes what does it mean to be part of the coalition?

Julie: Yes, exactly. When AUTODAWG formed, it was never clear to me if it was a part of the coalition or not. Then, when I showed up at one of their meetings I felt like I was crashing a party.

Enos: Look, I understand how you might have felt that way. But I think part of the reason it happened was because, every time we formed an autonomous direct action working group, it seemed like everyone in the entire coalition would show up. So we started asking ourselves: in what way are we autonomous? In what way are we a different group? Remember, this all started when DAN decided it wanted to work on the FTAA, and created its own working group. Then when all these people showed up, that working group effectively became this coalition. So DAN General was confused and we tried to create a new working group. And it just kept happening.

Marina: You should understand something about how DAN tends to operate, because some of the problem might just be confusion. The people we normally work with—the Lower East Side Collective people, Reclaim the Streets, Ya Basta!—all these groups see themselves as loosely part of DAN. We're kind of halfway between a group and a spokes network. Reclaim the Streets people for instance, they never come to our meetings, partly because they're more concerned with local New York issues, partly just because they don't like meetings, they're fun-loving party people, that's part of their whole schtick. But they always show up to actions. So, really, this was a working group for that larger, direct-action oriented community. Some people didn't want it to be a DAN working group, so we said, all right, let's just call it an "autonomous" one.

Meredith: Maybe, just to float a proposal here, why not just make a list of working groups we can post on the wall during meetings, so that new people can plug in? How would people feel about that?

Marina: I thought we were here to brainstorm ideas to take back to our groups. I'm uncomfortable about making this a decision-making body. I mean, don't get me wrong—that's a constructive proposal…

James: She's just suggesting we better articulate what we're doing. Calling that "decision-making" seems just like a matter of semantics, from where I sit.

Enos: I don't think it's just semantics. I think the problem is the different nature of the groups involved.

Maggie: I just want to know what to say to people who want to join us…

And so on, apparently *ad infinitum*. I step out early, partly because, though I had my hand up frequently, Julie never once called on me; partly because several of us had told Starhawk we were coming over at eight. She was staying with a friend named Nesta in Columbia University Housing, just a few blocks away.

Meeting with Starhawk, 8PM

A much, much more pleasant meeting. Inspiring, even.

Just about anyone active in the movement had at least heard of Starhawk. She was a sometime science fiction writer (her most famous novel was about a war between San Francisco and Los Angeles), sometime author of works on feminist paganism, who had been involved in direct action campaigns since the late 1970s. Almost everyone had seen images of her, beating a little drum, leading spiral dances. A practicing witch, she had a reputation as a kind of den mother for the pagan cluster, many wiccans in their forties or fifties, but including many much younger members. Most of us came to the meeting highly skeptical. It was not just the automatic suspicions about movement celebrities, or even East Coast attitudes towards purportedly flaky Californians. The one thing most of us had read by Starhawk was a piece she had written in a widely circulated collection that came out right after Seattle, called "How We Really Shut Down the WTO," in which she castigated the Black Bloc for refusing to take part in the spokescouncil, defying agreed-upon codes of conduct, and even spoke approvingly of pacifists who pointed out window-breakers to police. The piece, along with even angrier statements by NGO activists like Medea Benjamin, had set off a veritable explosion of rage from the more militant anarchists. Rage, eventually, had led to debate: over questions of solidarity, tactics, what activists owe each other on the streets. A lot of people had changed their minds, Starhawk among them, but at that time, her image had been fixed in everyone's mind—especially because, unlike characters like Medea Benjamin, who could just be dismissed, she considered herself an anarchist—which gave the whole thing something of the color of a personal betrayal.

So, at any rate, we were suspicious. Still, we came. At least five of us: Moose, Marina, Rufus, Warcry, and myself. If nothing else, everyone was willing to admit Starhawk's affinity group, the RANT collective, was doing excellent work giving trainings all over the country. By the end of the evening, we were pretty much completely won over.

Partly it was just that she so defied expectations. I don't know exactly what we were expecting, but at the very least one imagines an anarchist witch would be at least a little bit *outré*. Instead, what we encountered was one of the most pleasant, reasonable people imaginable. Everything about her was open, friendly, and completely down-to-earth.

Starhawk was staying with her friend Nesta, a noted ecofeminist theorist and occasional *Nation* writer who was around the same age, currently getting around in an extremely high-tech wheelchair. She was curious about the direct action scene in New York. Moose talked about Ya Basta!, Marina about the People's Law Collective, Rufus about the Action Medics.

Starhawk talked about her own experience, "I was one of those people who went to Seattle to do my civic duty and, after that, I expected I'd just get back to my life again. Here it is two years later and I haven't got back yet."

Nesta was quick to point out that it was not like she had no experience in this sort of thing. Really, they had got their start in the Diablo Canyon blockade in 1981. "Remember, how we had to invent all this stuff from scratch? We had no idea what we were doing, how to do things the present generation just takes for granted."

"Oh, there's been *enormous* progress," Starhawk agreed. "I can't tell you how many times I've seen kids, sixteen, seventeen years old, and they're already know how to do things it took us fifteen years to figure out.

"Well, if you want to know the history… I was basically an author back then. I had written several books on paganism, the Goddess religion. The network I'm with, Reclaiming, is based on a principle of Magical Activism—we wanted to use magic as a way of reshaping consciousness, to add a spiritual dimension that wasn't simply Christian. Because, at first, it was only Quakers who really knew how to do any of this. Spokescouncils, affinity groups—all of that really started with the Clamshell Alliance, working against the Seabrook Nuclear Power Plant in New Hampshire. There was this rebel Quaker group called Movement for a New Society that conducted trainings on nonviolence, but also taught this new mode of organizing—consensus, spokescouncils, how to make decisions democratically through small groups and then let them coordinate, bottom-up. And it worked so well that it just took off. At first, there was a kind of battle between the old and new ways of doing things. Most of those campaigns still had paid staff—the usual tiny underpaid staff, but paid staff nonetheless—and what were in effect steering committees, and there were always tensions between the top-down principle and the bottom-up."

Mumbles of "it's not exactly like such things never happen any more."

"And, as I say, then there was the problem of—well, we used to call them the "Quaker fascists," sometimes—whose kind of spirituality was almost completely alien to ours.

"I was part of a group we called the Matrix Collective, which was part of Reclaiming. We first got involved at the blockade in Diablo Canyon, which was this insane idea they had to build a nuclear power plant directly on a fault line in California, and then later with Lawrence Livermore Group, which was one of the main nuclear weapons labs at Berkeley. We wanted to use the same horizontal structure they'd used at Seabrook, but we also wanted to do ritual. In a way, that meant reinventing everything, because we soon realized that traditional nonviolent civil disobedience is deeply rooted in the ethos of Christianity—or anyway an extremely patriarchal version of religion. There was a reason there was always some male religious hero at the head of the movement. It's all about chastisement, self-denial, being willing to subject one's body to pain and suffering in the name of an idea—which is probably Truth or Love or something very nice like that, but still something abstract, transcendent. You negate the corporeal in the name of something higher. Which is what the big world religions are all about, really. So how do you square that with an immanent cosmology which celebrates the body and sees pleasure—especially sexual pleasure—as itself divine?"

She left the question open. "I don't know if any of us have really figured that out yet. One idea we had was to pull sources of strength out of apparent weakness, to show how little homely things like yarn can, if woven together—sort of like a spell—stop even military machinery. Remember all those webs of yarn from A16?"

"Oh, you mean ones all over the intersections so you had to crawl under them to get back and forth between blockades?" I asked.

"That was the Pagan Cluster's contribution. Actually the first time I remember using yarn was at a Bohemian Grove action sometime in the early eighties. They are the exclusive men's club that includes CEOs and lots of Reagan's cabinet—probably some of Bush's but it seemed more urgent during the Reagan years. They have a club in downtown San Francisco and a fancy summer resort on the Russian River where every year they have a weeklong summer camp for the rich and powerful, which they begin with a ritual called the Cremation of Care, in which they burn the effigy of a woman. Their motto is "Weaving spiders come not here," (I'm *not* making this up!) so we did a direct action where we webbed the whole Boho club in downtown SF and blocked them in."

"That's amazing."

"Yeah, it's funny," I said. "I always used to assume it was just paranoid conspiracy."

"Then probably the best web story ever was an action at Livermore in… '82? '83 was it?"

"Oh, that was so hilarious!" said Nesta, who had just driven in from the other room. "I remember that story. The women had woven a long web, like a warp, wasn't it?, on two sticks that could stretch across the road, wove in pictures of people's kids, flowers, herbs, etcetera, and used it to block busses of workers…"

"And we had thought of it as a basically symbolic gesture, an artistic statement, really. Nothing that would actually be physically effective. We'd almost finished it and I remember there were these three bike cops sneering at us. Suddenly, they gunned their engines and decided to just plow through it. The next thing we knew, there we were on the ground, and there were the three cops on the ground, and there were their motorcycles, and we were all so hopelessly tangled together it took ten minutes just to cut us out."

"Do you remember Bork, from the RNC in Philadelphia?" someone asked. "Remember, the one who appeared at the press conference the next day with two black eyes and her face all puffy? The reason they beat her up so badly in Philly...well, they had these cops on bicycles with big scissors. Every time they'd seen one of our banners, they'd hold the scissors out and drive their bikes right through them. Except Bork—obviously she had no idea they were going to be doing this—but she'd reinforced her banner with piano wire."

"Ouch!"

"If they'd tried to peddle through on neck level they'd have been in big trouble. As it was, two of them got some nasty cuts. (I mean—they never would have if they hadn't been illegally trying to destroy protesters' signs.) But, anyway, so they got off the bikes and started smashing her head on the ground."

Before long everyone was swapping war stories. Starhawk, as it turns out, was mad at the Black Bloc in Seattle mainly because they didn't respect the collective process—they refused to even attend the spokescouncils. Since then, she had come to thoroughly embrace the principle of diversity of tactics. "We used to do nonviolence training," she said. "Now we don't even call it that any more. We give what we call direct action trainings, with classic nonviolence as just one element of a much wider repertoire. After all, it's the refusal to cause harm or suffering to others that's the moral point, especially from any spiritual perspective that makes sense to me." Marina tried to suggest, gently, that she might seriously think about making this change of opinion on her part more broadly known.

One of the reasons Starhawk was anxious to meet with New York Ya Basta!, she finally admitted, was that she was a little worried whether that sort of tactic would translate across the Atlantic. She had first encountered Italian Ya Basta! before the actions against the IMF/World Bank meetings Prague in the fall of 2000. Prague was in many ways just extraordinary. She'd gone early to give trainings on consensus process, and ended up facilitating one of the big spokescouncils. "And it was one of those situations where... well, you know how it has to turn out. There were four different groups and two proposals. Either there would be four marches all starting in different places and they'd all converge somewhere, or there'd be one march and they'd all branch off in four. And there could only be one conclusion really: we'd start together, split apart, and hope, if everything went right, to eventually converge. But, of course, first we had to go through every possibility, every conceivable concern or objection for four, five hours, and finally you'd come up with the conclusion that everyone had to know we'd eventually come up with. By the end I was just exhausted, and practically saying, what's the point of all this anyway? And then this Romanian guy walked up to me and 'I can't believe what just happened. I would never thought anything like that was possible—a thousand people speaking twelve different languages all in a room together, making a decision together, without leaders.' He was just awestruck. Maybe we sometimes forget how revolutionary a lot of this really is."

"So did you have much to do with Ya Basta! in Prague?" someone asked. This had been their debut on the larger European stage, and they had performed spectacularly, ending in a famous confrontation with riot police on a bridge leading to the Convention Center where the IMF was meeting, which all of us had watched repeatedly on video.

"Oh, yes. To be honest, at first they rather gave me pause. In part, it was the blatant sexism. For three days of meetings, there was one guy, Luka, who did all the talking. He spoke a little English, but mainly he spoke in Italian. Then there was a woman who did all the translation work—that's three days of simultaneous translation, which I didn't think anyone could do for three days without going crazy—and a third, also a woman, who just sat there taking notes. They never rotated, never switched roles. It was obvious both women spoke perfect English, too, but they didn't venture an opinion once the whole time. Internally, within Ya Basta!, I couldn't make out any kind of an internal democratic process either. Maybe there were things going on I wasn't aware of."

Then it came to tactics. After three days of meetings, Ya Basta! finally decided that their front line would be armed with two-by-fours. Starhawk began talking very slowly and precisely. "To beat against the shields of the riot cops. Not to actually hit them with. The idea was they could push through the police lines that way and they wouldn't really be attacking the police."

Eyes blinked.

Mouths opened.

"They really brought two-by-fours?"

"It took us days to consense on that."

"Jeez," said Moose. "I mean, okay… I can see the logic but… None of us have ever dreamed of doing anything like that."

"To be honest," said Starhawk, "I'm rather glad to hear it. Because when I first heard there were Americans intending to use Tute Bianche tactics, I was a little worried that people might get seriously hurt. You have to bear in mind that it took them five, maybe six years to get to the point where they could do something like that in Europe. Six years of continual media work, hammering away at the idea of the legitimacy of defensive tactics, endless media stunts. And you have to bear in mind that the media in Italy is a thousand times more sympathetic to social movements than the media here. Even on the TV, which is almost all owned by Berlusconi, Luka is up there every time there's a big action, on talk shows, debating the police or rightwing journalists—things that would be inconceivable in this country."

"Wow. You know, since I'm the one handling media for New York Ya Basta!," I said, "I've actually been a little worried about that. We've considered various media stunts. But basically, the press here always let the cops frame the story—and there's no way to even broach the subject of, say, the philosophy behind our actions. Believe me I've tried. There's no interest. They just ask us if we're going to be 'violent,' with padding and shields taken as evidence that we're looking for a fight. We've been trying to create the same effect just by being over-the-top silly, with a kazoo band, silly crests, and costumes, so that if people just see us on TV and they're calling us violent, it'll be obvious there's something wrong. But even then we know perfectly well, even if we all dress up as Barney the Dinosaur with our hands tied behind our backs, a good editor could still be able to come up with some image that'll make us look frightening."

"Plus, in almost all European countries, there's a different relation with the police. Everybody knows each other. The whole thing is a little like a game."

And so on. We drifted off to other topics, but Starhawk had registered her concerns. They had echoed some that had certainly occurred to me at one time or another. I had no idea if any of this was actually going to work.

Tuesday, March 13

AUTODAWG meeting at the National Lawyer's Guild, 8PM

This was actually the first meeting I'd attended with the Direct Action Working Group everyone had been complaining about.

It began with a report-back. Two Brooklyn activists had just returned from Québec City and were all agog over the beauty of the city, its ancient towers and anarchist graffiti. Then Mac went over breaking developments. He had stayed on at the meeting at the pizza place until the bitter end and done his best to patch things up with the ISO, who, in turn, now wanted to assure us they were completely committed to getting people up to Québec for the direct action on Friday, and not just the labor march the next day. The latest developments from Akwesasne were promising as well: the Canadian Union of Postal Workers was interested in helping, also some auto workers; Warclub, a Mohawk hip-hop band, wanted to be involved in some capacity; our Warrior allies on the Canadian side were already in contact with the Boots family, who were one of the most important Mohawk families on the US side and seemed interested, and so forth.

There were two main orders of business for the meeting itself. The first was the CLAC consulta: I end up being put in charge of coordinating the whole thing. Some discussion followed on the safest options: train, bus, car.

The other was an action planned for April 1. Enos, a local underground cartoonist had been taking point on this one with a friend named Nicky. They had also successfully managed to draft an activist named Twinkie, and this was a bit of a coup. Twinkie was an androgynous young woman whose parents were from Thailand, maybe nineteen or twenty years old with a dramatic punk haircut, famous for many things, but probably most of all for her enormous lung capacity. She was much sought after at demos for her amazing powers of projection, not to mention her knack for being able to invent songs and slogans for any occasion, on the spot. Such people are, as one might imagine, an enormous asset in any demo. In the past she'd largely avoided DAN, preferring to work with more community-oriented groups, but she had decided to throw herself into the FTAA organizing. She also had considerable experience in graphic design.

> Enos: We figured that since NEGAN is going to be meeting on the 31st in Burlington, we could go up from there to the border the next day—which, of course, is also April Fool's Day. It's basically a kind of publicity stunt, a media thing, to bring people's attention to the issues, but also to the fact that they've been systematically stopping political activists from crossing over into Canada. And not just turning away people with molotovs, but regular community activists.
>
> Mac: Just last week they refused entry to Lorenzo Komboa Ervin—on the basis of some arrest thirty years ago.
>
> Enos: If they think you're political, they go through your record and all they need is to come up with one arrest, and they can deny you entry. It doesn't even have to be a conviction. In some cases, they've been denying people entry just on suspicion.

This was, of course, part of the point of the police custom of making mass arrests of hundreds of people at a time during protests. The DC police were particularly famous for surrounding and trapping columns of hundreds of marchers, and then arresting them for "failure to disperse." The arrests never hold up—they are obviously illegal—but, in the process, everyone is photographed and fingerprinted and this information is then put out on international databases.

> Nicky: So, anyway, the idea is to do something to highlight the hypocrisy, since the FTAA is supposed to be all about eliminating border controls—except, of course, what they mean is border controls that affect corporations, not

those that affect people. So, we figured we'll have a bunch of activists dress up as the sort of products that will be getting through. I was going to go disguised as a dollar bill. Someone else was going to dress up as a genetically modified tomato… you get the idea. So when they stop us we can say, "We thought that was the only way we could get through the border."

Twinkie: I was going to go as an HMO. Though I'm still not entirely sure how the costume is going to work.

Someone: Maybe an insurance salesman?

Enos: Anyway, so we could do some kind of skit based on that, throw a press conference while, in the background, the Canadian police are interrogating and beating up a bunch of vegetables. We're in contact with some radical media people in Vermont who would definitely cover the story, and we're hoping to get WBAI, maybe even *Frontline* for television coverage.

Mandy: You know, technically, if they're excluding any American with an arrest record, that would include Bush, wouldn't it? Maybe we could get someone to go as George W with a big "DWI" written across his forehead?

Steve: Doesn't this all kind of depend on the assumption that they will, in fact, stop us at the border? What happens if they just wave us through? Just out of spite?

Nicky: You don't have to worry about that. That's not the way cops work. If the police are under orders to stop activists, then that's what they have to do. The danger is more they might not even notice we're activists. That's what I'm worried about.

Enos: Well, we all know cops are dumb, but… I'm thinking, if they see some guy trying to cross the border dressed as genetically modified food, they're probably going to figure out they're dealing with an activist.

Gradually, the meeting becomes something more like a conversation. Two queer activists named Mandy and Jen are wondering if we are romanticizing these "Mohawk Warriors." Aren't we really dealing with people who aren't even remotely on the same page as we are on issues like sexism or homophobia. Twinkie, Target, and Mac are all tripping over each other to respond, detailing the whole history of women's councils and the constitutional niceties of the confederacy of the Six Nations. (Everyone, it seems, had been reading up on this.) "Actually," Mac says, "one of the main accomplishments of the Warrior Society during the standoff at Oka was to revive the Clan Mother system as an alternative to the government-sponsored tribal government. By now, all the key decisions on the Canadian side are in the hands of women's councils. One of Shawn's hopes for Akwesasne is to start a similar process moving on the other side."

Mandy is surprised, but guarded. "It sounds wonderful. But don't you sometimes think it's all just a little too good to be true?"

The thought had occurred to me as well—maybe all of us. It was hard to deny that, from the perspective of your typical New York anarchist, to have a bunch of Mohawk Warriors promise to open a bridge for you—let alone a bunch of Mohawk Warriors aiming to revive a matriarchal decision-making structure—was about the coolest thing one could possibly imagine. You can only wonder if it's all just a little bit too cool.

An hour later, we were all strolling over to St. Mark's place for drinks at the Grassroots Tavern. There was some kind of trash worship party in Brooklyn that night. Everyone was discussing whether it would be worthwhile to go. Mac and Moose get into a long argument about whether DAN was, at this point, an explicitly anarchist organization. Are there any explicitly non-anarchists in DAN? Or at least, other than in DAN Labor? No one is quite sure. Twinkie vanishes and reappeared fifteen minutes later with some Radical Cheerleaders and a huge pile of dumpster-dived sushi. Minor tensions ensued when some of them weren't let into the bar for lack of ID. After a brief consultation outside, the matter was resolved somehow. Twinkie, on discovering I'm not a vegetarian, keeps handing me pieces of sushi with fish. Not keen on eating dumpster-dived sushi, I kept trying to hide them. She keeps noticing. Rufus gently explains that it's really the exact same stuff one would have bought in the store twenty minutes earlier: there are laws about when sushi has to be thrown away and, half the time, the moment they put it out, there's already an activist or local punk kid or two waiting to take it away again.

Thursday, March 15

Outrageous article appears in the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, reporting rumors that Akwesasne Mohawks will be illegally "smuggling" activists with criminal records over the border into Canada. Apparently, Akwesasne itself has the reputation in Canada of being a den of smugglers—mainly of liquor and tobacco—so the implication is the same boats will be carrying a new criminal export—anarchists—presumably for money. Emails and phone calls are immediately exchanged about how to respond.

YABBA formation in Betty's studio, 7PM

We merrily bash each other about. This time, Smokey has come up with a suit made out of empty plastic coke-bottles, which proves remarkably resilient against most powerful blows of our padded billy-clubs. We go through various defensive scenarios: How to hold the line if cops are simply trying to break through a shield wall. How to defend a specific individual they're trying to snatch. One thing that is becoming obvious is that with all this gear, we're going to need at least twenty minutes prep time before we can go into action.

There's a long discussion of crests: we've managed to secure a fairly large number of surplus British riot police helmets from a mail-order catalogue (and each comes with two free rubber shin guards!), and spray-painted most of them pumpkin-orange. A plan has been floating around to personalize them by putting mock-heraldic devices on top: stuffed penguins, kewpie dolls, pinwheels, that sort of thing. The problem is, as Smokey points out, that this would individualize us: police could easily pick any one of us out for arrest if we no longer all looked alike. Would it be possible, perhaps, to have some kind of widget on top of each helmet so that one could plug and unplug crests at will? That way, we could constantly switch them around? But the project seems more trouble than we're likely to put into it.

Announcements: There will be legal trainings in Burlington from 1PM to5PM Saturday, probably one mini-training just for Yabbas.

Emma and Moose are away doing a street training.

Smokey and Flamma point out that, even without padding, a Ya Basta! formation could serve as a perfect diversion. During an anti-sweatshop rally two weeks earlier, six of us just put on the chemical jumpsuits. The moment we started suiting up, the top cop ran up and demanded to know what was going on and, throughout the subsequent march, we were surrounded on four sides by police at all times. We tied down the bulk of their forces just with the six of us.

I draft Sasha to join me at the Québec City consulta.

Friday, March 16

Another thing that emerged from the Thursday meeting was that, as "Minister of Information" for Ya Basta!, it was my job to fashion a press release responding to the *Globe and Mail* piece. After the meeting, I locked myself in my room with a laptop and, around 2 or 3AM, sent off a draft to the Yabba list for feedback:

> **PRESS RELEASE**
> **From: the New York City Ya Basta! Collective**
> **& the New York City Direct Action Network**
>
> On Thursday March 15, an article appeared in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* which misrepresented the results of an historic meeting between US and Canadian activists and traditional Mohawks from Akwesasne earlier this month.
>
> Contrary to the article's claims, there have never been any plans to "smuggle" activists (let alone "criminals") across the border. Our intentions have been, from the beginning, public and above-board; public statements were released, among other places, through the NYC Independent Media Center (www.nyc.

> indymedia.org) and on the Internet. It is hardly our fault if reporters and police (who we had assumed were monitoring us fairly carefully!) could not be bothered to look up these readily available public documents.

After setting out the actual facts of the matter, it continued, using a lot of the language we'd developed in previous discussions within Ya Basta!:

> WHY HAS THIS BEEN NECESSARY?
>
> While we have always been open, the FTAA itself has been, from the beginning, a secret project, created by government and corporate elites with as little input from the public as possible. For this reason, its sponsors have regularly used international borders to prevent representatives of the public from coming anywhere near their meetings, even though these protesters are, in their opposition to the treaty, simply expressing the views of the overwhelming majority of the citizens of the countries these signatories claim to represent. During the OAS meetings in Windsor, Ontario last summer, which laid the groundwork for the FTAA, approximately two out of every three activists who attempted to cross the border from the US were prevented by physical force. In past months, activists trying to attend meetings in Québec have been turned back at the border, been detained, and been subjected to illegal searches and seizures. We have every reason to believe authorities are intending to use force to prevent environmentalists, union members, and other political dissidents from airing their opposition to the secret negotiations in Québec City in April.
>
> AGAINST THE STUPIDITY OF BORDERS
>
> The use of international border controls to squash political dissent is yet more proof that the process referred to as "globalization" is in fact nothing of the kind; as well as the absurdity of calling the vast international movement that has risen to oppose it in the name of global democracy an "anti-globalization movement." It's time to drop the propaganda and speak honestly about these things. If "globalization" were to mean anything, it would mean the gradual dismantling of national borders to allow the free movement of people, possessions, and ideas. Corporate "globalization" has meant the exact opposite: it has meant trapping the poor behind increasingly fortified borders so as to let the rich take advantage of their desperation. The number of armed guards along the US-Mexican border has more than doubled since the signing of NAFTA; refugees and asylum seekers languish like criminals in twenty-three hour lockdown; immigrant communities live in constant terror. We can only expect more of the same if NAFTA is extended to the entire Western Hemisphere.
>
> Instead, Ya Basta! is calling for the abolition of national borders and recog-

nition of a principle of global citizenship. We believe that every human being born on this planet has the right to live where she chooses, and not have her life chances be determined by some random geographical accident of birth. We hold that every human has an equal right to the basic means of existence: air, water, food, shelter, education, and health care. We want to see the authority of nation-states gradually dissolve and power devolve onto free communities on the basis of true economic and political democracy; a process that will lead to an outpouring of new forms of wealth and culture that the impoverished minds of the current rulers of the world could not possibly imagine. The Direct Action Network offers its own success as a rapidly growing continental federation, based on principles of direct democracy and decentralized consensus decision-making, as living proof that rulers—and this includes elected "representatives"—are simply unnecessary. Ordinary people are perfectly capable of governing their own affairs on the basis of equality and simple decency.

National borders were created through violence, and are maintained through violence. They are the remnants of a barbarous age that humanity must, if it is to survive, eventually overcome. We refuse to recognize their legitimacy.

FOR THE SELF-DETERMINATION OF COMMUNITIES AND MOHAWK SOVEREIGNTY

We are choosing to travel via Cornwall in order to express our solidarity with the Mohawk Nation and our recognition of its sovereignty over territories it occupied long before the US and Canadian governments even existed. Nothing illustrates the insanity of national borders more than the fact that the same governments that waged genocidal war against the Mohawks now claim the right to determine who can cross from one part of Mohawk territory to another. Our solidarity with our Traditional Mohawk sisters and brothers is rooted in our support for regional autonomy and communal self-determination in the face of the arrogant power of the state; but, also, in our profound respect and admiration for a Nation whose political contributions to the world—the creation of a federative constitution without a centralized state, the collective management of resources, respect for individual autonomy, the role of peacemaking, the political empowerment of women—provide, for many of us, visions of how a future just society might work that is far more compelling than the US Constitution, which was partially inspired by it. We wish to thank our Mohawk friends for their generous invitation and express our profound commitment to furthering their struggle for sovereignty, communal rights, and social justice, just as they have recognized our right, as world citizens, to make our presence known to the politicians who presume to act in our names in Québec City on April 19th–21st.

It ended with contact numbers for Ya Basta! (me), DAN (Eric), and the Mohawk Warriors (Shawn).

Saturday, March 17

9PM, Saturday night there's a huge Zapatista event. The EZLN had marched into Mexico City to lobby for an indigenous autonomy bill a month before, and the movie was already out. The showing was accompanied by report-backs from two DAN people who'd been there at the time.

Afterwards, parties. Powwow outside one of them about the press release. Time is of the essence, certainly, but (several ask) shouldn't we have to clear this with the Mohawks before releasing it? Moose says he called Shawn and Shawn just said, "Well, we don't ask you to approve our press releases." Eric from the DAN Media Collective agrees to send them out by Blast Fax to every major news outlet in the country the next day, and a copy goes up on the web page.

It's not clear if anyone ever read it. Certainly no one ever calls us back. All such grand statements simply disappear into the ether, just like all the op-eds and letters we regularly send out to newspapers before major actions. Then, the same media outlets who refuse to run them complain to their readers that it's impossible to figure out what these anti-globalization types are actually for.

Sunday, March 18

DAN meeting at Charas

Another long meeting. Prolonged discussion on the current state of negotiations with Shawn and OCAP.

Mac urges DAN to endorse the Cornwall action: best, he says, to do so as quickly as possible before the next NEGAN meeting on the thirty-first to ensure people do go to the direct action rather than leaving with the union buses the next day. So we endorse it.

There's a long discussion about a fund-raising party being planned at a place called the Frying Pan, about the *Globe and Mail* story and others like it, and, especially, about the media event planned for April Fool's Day. An April 1 working group had already formed and hashed out the details:

> Enos: That recent article in the *Globe and Mail* is actually symptomatic of the kind of press we've been getting. It's all pretty much the same: we're going to be violent, disruptive, we're a bunch of hoodlums, not representative of anyone or anything, coming to set fire to the city. So, we were trying to figure out how to provide some more realistic images of who we are and what we're about. That's how we hit on the idea of doing an action with funny costumes, something silly and harmless. The idea was that we could time it for April 1st,

which is not only April Fool's Day, it's the day that SalAMI is carrying out their "show the text" action in Ottawa. We show up at the border, we tell them politely that we're going to join the protests in Ottawa; we get turned back; we hold a press conference. Explain to them this is what we have to do to get any media attention.

That's pretty much it. To make this work, though, we're going to need lots more people at the meetings. We only got three or four last time. I'm going as Bush, Nicky will be a dollar bill. Julie from the Urban Justice League is going to be a genetically engineered tomato…

Target: It's too bad it's on the first, actually, because that's the day they're having the men's anti-sexism workshop at Charas.

Nicky: Oh, yeah. Oops. Well, hopefully it won't be the last one.

I spend much of the next week trying to figure out exactly how one goes about renting a car (I don't drive), making preparations for Québec. Several people say they might be interested in coming, but only one follows through: Dweisel, from the Free CUNY Collective. That makes four of us in one car. I skip the next week's Ya Basta! meeting and head off the next weekend.

CHAPTER 2

A TRIP TO QUÉBEC CITY

Herein lies the story of my first trip to Québec City. One strange thing about the months leading up to the FTAA actions was how our imaginative landscapes were constantly flipping back and forth. When Jaggi and his friends were in town everything was about Québec City and the wall there. After about a month of meetings in New York, all that had become ghostly, insubstantial; Cornwall, Mohawks, border actions, all seemed tangible and real. Over the next weekend, that all reversed again, and I came out of it utterly, completely determined to make it to the Summit. This determination was to create considerable strain with some of my friends, at certain points, but I never abandoned it.

Friday, March 23, 2001

The day was mainly spent driving. Me, Emma, Sasha, all from Ya Basta!, and Dean, from the Free CUNY Collective, set off from the city fairly early in the morning with a supply of vegan food and large collection of music cassettes.

Technically, Sasha, the filmmaker, was not actually going to the consulta but to an Independent Media Center conference going on a few blocks away at the same time. He also had the inestimable quality of enjoying day-long stints of driving, which was good because I didn't drive at all. Emma, who was spoking for Ya Basta! despite the fact that she was going to do Black Bloc, was a budding artist, also in her twenties, known for installations around the city. A dedicated vegan, she worked in a health food store in Lower Manhattan. Dean was a grad student in sociology, tall, clean-cut, looking vaguely like a young Montgomery Clift. He started the trip famished, convinced us to stop for a considerable breakfast, and soon after started complaining of car sickness. I pulled a Dramamine from my medicine tin. He took it, nodded off almost immediately, and ended up spending almost the entire trip from the Hudson Valley to Montréal dozing in the back seat.

We made the border crossing without a problem, trying to look as clean-cut as possible. (Emma attempted to cover up the green parts of her hair with a little stocking-cap, and pulled a hoodie over the grungy Clash T-shirt, but we wondered if it was even necessary. American punk rockers, as Sasha pointed out, are quite regularly allowed entry into Canada.) Sasha, in the driver's seat, explained that we were going to an Independent Media Conference, a claim made infinitely more convincing by the large expensive video camera sitting next to him (he had been occasionally stopping to do panoramic shots of the countryside). The border cops waved us on. We skirted through Montréal, staring at a gigantic folding map to the music of Professor Longhair, getting lost only once, marveling at the billboards advertising vacations in Cuba (the first dramatic evidence that we really are in a different country), and started the final, flat, rather dreary run to Québec as the sun began to set. We hit the city itself by early evening.

We Arrive

Navigating our way through the city itself is not easy. The city planners seem to have seen nothing wrong with putting three or four one-way streets in a row, all going in the same direction; they also didn't seem to feel it was very important to put names on said streets, at least anywhere one might be able to see them. There's also the fact that the CLAC driving instructions we're using are exceptionally bad. Finally, we manage to locate our first stop: the Independent Media Center.

Actually, the IMC is a pretty standard first stop when you come to a new city because the place is almost never empty, and full of information. Technically, the building at which we arrived was not exactly the IMC but the CMAQ (Centre des médias alternatifs du Québec; it was pronounced "smack"), run by an NGO-funded, SalAMI-allied media group called Alternativs. This, at least, is what we learn from Madhava, sometime of the New York IMC, sometime camp counselor in Poughkeepsie, who we discover sitting hunched over a computer scratching a scruffy blonde beard. "The nice thing about Alternativs," he says, "is that they have money. Oodles of it. We've got equipment coming out of our ears. The not-so-nice thing is they have an extremely traditional, top-down idea of journalistic organization: beat assignments, desk editors…that sort of thing. Of course, give us time," gesturing towards the other old IMC hands huddled in a small meeting on the other side of the room. "We'll democratize things."

He introduces us to a tiny, slightly pixyish woman named Isabel, who then gives us directions. The next twenty minutes are spent trudging up a steep hill to the CLAC/CASA Welcome Center, in a beautiful old building with extremely heavy wooden doors, only to discover that the Welcome Center is really only a place to find housing and we actually already have housing lined up (everything had been arranged by phone with the CLAC people before we set out). Finally, around 10PM, after securing what we think are adequate directions, we return to the car and set off to meet our hosts.

Our Hosts

Our hosts, as it turned out, lived in an extremely beautiful neighborhood, all cornices and chimneys and tiny shops set in the corners of nineteenth century apartment blocks. It looked vaguely like the West Village, but much less pretentious—partly, I thought, because positioned as it was across an insanely steep hill, it had never been seriously gentrified. I was later to learn this was the heart of Jean Baptiste, one of the few "popular" neighborhoods left in the high part of the town near the old, walled city, now mostly full of hotels and convention centers.

"Welcome, my revolutionary friends!" beamed the young man who greeted us at the door. He was surrounded by five or six young people practically piling on top each other to show their happiness at our arrival, but throughout the night, he did almost all the talking—presumably, because he was the only one with any sort of command of conversational English.

All in all, the group looked almost exactly like one would imagine a group of revolutionaries should look—at least, if all you knew was that they were from a place that was in some ways sort of like Europe, but in others sort of like Latin America. The one who first greeted us was tall, almost emaciatedly thin, with a beret and Mephistophelian beard. Soft-spoken in his uncertain English, he otherwise looked almost exactly like Leon Trotsky. His companion with a dark beard pulled off a plausible Ché Guevara; a third man, named Pascal, with a long pony-tail and Ché Guevara T-shirt was harder to call. He didn't seem to correspond to any revolutionary hero I could remember, but I couldn't help thinking, if there wasn't one, there really ought to have been. (I asked myself: why do we assume that if someone has spent a good deal of time and energy ensuring they look exactly like we think a revolutionary should look, that in itself makes them somehow inauthentic? Most capitalists spend a great deal of time and energy into ensuring they look exactly like we assume capitalists are supposed to look like. No one suggests it makes them any less a capitalist.)

There were also two teenage girls in the living room who appear largely ornamental: they never say a word in our presence, even in French, though they invariably started talking the moment we leave the room. Later, we're told they are both around seventeen years old and embarrassed by their lack of English.

The apartment contained two bedrooms, a large hammock, and several mats already spread out for sleeping bags. Our hosts were obviously used to multiple houseguests. Actually, it was a pretty typical student activist apartment: endless bookshelves, all the books in French, volumes of cartoons and poetry scattered around on second-hand furniture, mock religious posters, leftist magazines, a refrigerator largely full of left-over takeout. “You are hungry?” asked Trotsky. Emma asks if they have vegan food and Trotsky, assuring her there is, heads to the kitchen to find some.

“I shouldn’t have asked that,” she realized, as we stand around smiling at our silent companions. “I bet this is like Poland. If you ask people in Poland for vegetarian food, they think that means, not *much* meat. If you ask for vegan, they think that means ‘actually is vegetarian.’ Real vegan they’ve never even heard of.”

“Maybe we should have picked something up on the way,” said Dean.

“We probably wouldn’t be able to find anything at this hour anyway.”

Ché fetches wine, Trotsky brings out bread and charcuterie. It’s all extremely tasty. Emma samples some bread, looks suspiciously at the rest; later, when our hosts aren’t looking, sneaks off to another room, pulls out her backpack, and produces a giant vat of organic peanut butter and some pita bread.

Over wine, we explain we’re all anarchists, working with CLAC/CASA. Trotsky—actually, his name is Sebastien—explains that, yes, they understand that we’re connected to CLAC. Here, they are all Trotskyites—but, he’s quick to add, “not part of any sect.” They’re with GOMM (Group Opposed to the Globalization of Markets) and Sebastien is also with OQP (Opération Québec Printemps 2001), which was organizing logistics for the protests (it was pronounced “occupée,” appropriately enough considering they were planning various campus occupations). GOMM’s position is that it is critical to take part in larger social movements, even if they are reformist, so as to radicalize them. “Of course,” he continues, “in Québec, owing to the political situation, every group has to take certain positions: either you are for immediate independence, or you are for some kind of autonomy in coalition with working-class groups in English-speaking Canada. So we had to take a position. We are for complete independence. But we work mainly with student unions,”—which in Québec, Sebastien explained, is a slightly unusual situation because of the extremely weird form of the educational system here. In the 1960s, the longtime old-fashioned right-wing governor who’d ruled Québec for twenty years was finally voted out. He had felt no more than twenty percent needed higher education. The new Governor raised it to sixty or seventy percent. However, he took his model from California: not the system they have in California now, but a bizarre model used in California between 1954 and 1964 or so, where they take one year from High School and one from University to create a two-year Intermediate School. These Intermediate students, he explained, are actually still the most radical, much more so than the University students. And they will all be on strike for the FTAA. (Some will be occupying the colleges too.) They could turn out as many as fifty thousand, for the protests, if they mobilize fully. Probably they won’t. Well, they’ll definitely turn out at least twenty thousand. (The two silent girls represent this stratum.)

As the evening continues, more food appears, and effects of hunger are replaced by those of the wine. We all discover that we are really quite fascinated in the dynamics of Québécois socialist politics. Sebastien is happy and chatty. Others pop in and out. Talking to Sebastien is sometimes a little frustrating, owing to his typical Trotskyite habit of using the term "we" ("we don't like to work with this group," "we take a strong position on that") without ever actually telling us what "we" meant. Usually, it didn't seem to refer to GOMM. It seemed to refer to a much tighter Marxist organization that saw GOMM as part of a broader popular front, which, of course, it was their duty to build up to be as broad as possible. Therefore, they didn't want to be too radical or too militant. But we never heard its name. Not that it really bothered us. Sebastien explained GOMM was not working directly with CLAC and CASA or attending their spokes (they seemed to be going to the SalAMI spokes instead), but planning its own action, a classic nonviolent civil disobedience, Seattle style, with lockdowns and blockades. They did, however, want to coordinate with CLAC to ensure they found an appropriate spot, which could be reserved for classic nonviolent civil disobedience. The best would be to blockade the one highway that leads up to the perimeter. He points to a map on the CLAC/CASA information pamphlet already lying on the corner of the table. "You see, here, in Zone H."

"You mean down at the foot of the hill there?" Dean asks. "It's extremely steep, isn't it?"

Sasha confirms: "Yes, I think we passed through it five or six times when we were getting lost earlier in the evening."

"Yeah. It's far too steep to be appropriate for red tactics. It would be suicidal to try to charge up there."

Sebastien wants us to put in a good word at the spokescouncil, and we, of course, agree. Conversation shifts back to the complex dynamics of anti-FTAA coalition building. Pascal produces a Xeroxed page with a kind of flow-chart, illustrating the three or four different labor confederations, umbrella groups, full of circles and arrows and alliances. The thing is you have such widespread unionization in Canada, compared to the US anyway, and so many unions are so militant. "Which, actually," I say, "makes me think of some possibilities. Has anybody thought of talking to the hotel workers in the place the Summit is actually going to be held?"

Sasha nods vigorously. "Or more relevant, perhaps, the food handlers union."

Sebastien smiles. "Yes, actually, there were some people talking to organizers for some of the workers in the Conference Center about the possibility of maybe putting laxatives into the big feast. It wasn't even a serious discussion, just like putting out silly ideas. The very next day, the Summit organizers publicly announced that they would be using their own special caterers and all food would be flown in from another province."

CONSULTA DAY 1

Saturday, March 24

After breakfast, we drop off Sasha at the IMC and head to the spokescouncil, which is being held below the old city, in some kind of adult education building along a broad avenue called Réne-Lévesque. The spokes is only just getting started. The antechamber is a long hallway with vending machines, a little niche for drinking coffee, and a vast table full of activist literature.

The Table Outside

On the table, endless stacks of papers. Arranged in neat piles are all the handouts one always sees, in any action: Legal Information, Medical Information, resources for independent journalists. There are also various calls for border actions, one for a feminist action, numerous informational broadsheets about the FTAA itself and the damage it will do to labor and environmental rights, replete with dramatic headlines and cartoon illustrations. Most are bilingual; a few are only in French. There are beautiful "Carnival Against Capitalism" posters available for a suggested ten-dollar contribution, unattended, with a bowl in front for the money. I pick up two, leave twenty bucks American. Towards the very end of the table is a priceless ten-page pamphlet called "The Summit of the Americas …. From the Bottom Up." It explains who CLAC and CASA are, with a Plan of Action, Tour Guide for politically minded visitors, transportation information, URLs, and, crucially, a map of the city with an outline of the security perimeter, divided into zones. This is the one that was sitting on the table last night. I take two of them.

There's also an enormous bowl full of homemade stickers, apparently free:

> **FTAA: free trade accords menace our forests.**
> **FUCK Cars.**
> **Don't Fear Technology. Fear Those Who Control It.**
> **No Government Can Ever Give You Freedom.**
> **A Rich Man's Heart is a Desert. An Anarchist's Heart is a Kingdom.**
> **It Didn't Begin in Seattle. It Won't End in Québec City.**
> **HOLY SHIT! We'd better do something… End Corporate Rule!** (with a cartoon of a gas mask)
> **THE MOST FUN YOU'VE HAD SINCE SEATTLE: QUÉBEC CITY.** (with another cartoon of a gas mask)
> **Get Your Hands Off Our Bodies.** (with a picture of a naked female torso)

Armed and Dangerous. (with a cartoon image of a scary-looking cop)
No Matter Who You Vote For, I'm Still Here. (with a cartoon image of an even scarier-looking cop)

Along with these are a variety of tiny colorful buttons, suggested donation of fifty cents, with CLAC's lovable raccoon mascot, fist in air. (Anarchists have a thing for small furry animals, particularly if they live underground.) No T-shirts, though. Dean picks up a couple buttons. Then we go in.

The Room Inside

Inside is a very large room which seems to normally be used for dance recitals, or maybe gymnastics. There are polished hardwood floors and one wall is made entirely of mirrors. There are already about a hundred fifty to two hundred activists sitting in a giant circle amidst endless piles of coats and other gear. Near the door is a registration table, attended by a young woman with a box full of squares of colored paper, who assures us that the meeting has only been going on for at most twenty minutes. Whispered clarifications: anyone attending the meeting can speak, but only spokes can actually vote. Each collective or affinity group is allowed up to two votes, indicated by paper squares. Have our groups empowered us as spokes? Yes? She hands us our two pieces of paper, one red, one blue. "Oh yes," she says, "I almost forgot. None of you are working journalists or in any way connected to law enforcement?"

"What do you think?"

"Well, you know, we have to ask."

As the spoke from NYC DAN, Lesley has already joined the circle, along with her ride, an activist named Lynn, also from New York, who works with Rainforest Relief. Hugs are exchanged all around. The two have already constructed a little nest of documents, coats, sweaters, thermoses, and the like on their section of the floor. I take out my field equipment, which consists of a cheap CVS three-subject notebook and a very expensive rapidograph (technical pens: I like them because you don't have to apply any real pressure in writing so your hand doesn't cramp even if you have to write for hours, which, in such meetings, I usually did). I unpack a couple of cashmere sweaters to be used as pillows, my contribution to the nest, and everyone starts whispering.

The first question is inevitable. "So what's all this about voting? What kind of process are they using here?"

"Well, that's interesting," explains Lesley. "CLAC is kind of weird that way. As for CASA, they've never organized a spokescouncil. I mean, I think they're doing really well for people with no experience." Basically, she said, activists in Québec City have had, until very recently, no real experience with consensus process at all; they're learning this completely from scratch. But they'd already made enormous progress, having moved in the last few months from using a majority vote system to a sort of semi-consensus system, in which, if they fail to find consensus on the first go, they move to seventy-five percent super-majority vote. It ends up working about the same as full consensus would. Most of the people facilitating this meeting are from Montréal, however, and some of them are very experienced facilitators. "CLAC also uses a rather unusual system for taking turns—it's a little controversial—where they insist on strict gender equity. For every contested proposal, they alternate between one woman speaking in favor of the proposal, one man in favor, one woman speaking against the proposal, one man against. In practice, it turns out a little bit more a rule of thumb than a strict practice, but it's a useful way to make sure no one can forget the underlying principle."

The process, she goes on to explain, is a bit more formal than we're used to. This is, in part, because this is technically a consultation, not a spokescouncil properly speaking: the local organizers are coming up with the broad framework for the action, but they want affinity groups coming from outside the province to give them some advice. Also, they want to get some idea of what those outsiders are intending to do. Therefore, the plan is to move quickly from the general meeting to a breakout session, where we'll divide into small, manageable groups and each take on a series of questions provided by the organizers. At the end of the breakout, everyone will explain just what their affinity group was thinking they would actually be doing during the Summit. This will become the basis on which the facilitators can construct a list of different sorts of action (blockades, street theater, etc.), which, in turn, will then allow for a further breakout, allowing people to consult in small groups with those who intend to do roughly the same sort of thing. After which there will be dinner and a party, and the next morning we'll reconvene for a final plenary.

In most spokescouncils, there are two facilitators: one male, one female. In this one, there are four. This is mainly because of the language problem: the local CASA folks seem to speak only French; the Montréal activists switch back and forth according to no logic I can decipher; everyone else is speaking English. So, there are four people sitting on chairs at the head of the circle: two, apparently, who are actually facilitating, two just to translate—though, in practice, I observe (I have my notebook out most of the time, scribbling observations furiously) they seem to periodically switch. Except for Jaggi, who is clearly trying to keep himself in a merely auxiliary role.

As we came in, the facilitators were fielding a request by a radical video team to record part of the proceedings; after hearing the usual objections, the proposal is reframed: we will invite them to come back later in the afternoon, when we are not discussing action plans but only logistics, and then put it to a vote again. (In the end, of course, there is too much opposition.) A woman from CASA, who I think was called Celine, began by summarizing the information already printed in the handouts.

> *Celine*[1]: These color blocs are not fixed, and they will not necessarily be physically separate, though we will have one area reserved for the Green Bloc. They are:
>
> The Green Bloc is the more artistic, festive style of demo, where there is no risk of having to defend themselves.
>
> The Yellow Bloc is obstructive. This is classic nonviolent civil disobedience. It is defensive, nonviolent: blockades or attempts to occupy ground, for example, which involve a definite risk of arrest.
>
> The Red Bloc is disruptive. This is the disturbance bloc, which will try to disrupt the Summit, where participants should be aware of a high risk of repression and arrest. We are expecting creative, diverse styles of disruptive action here.
>
> We emphasize "disruption" because, from early on, CLAC and CASA came to the conclusion that, given the constraints of the security fence and massive police mobilization, attempting a repeat of Seattle and actually trying to shut down the meetings was a strategy unlikely to succeed. We decided on an alternative strategy, which combined efforts to disrupt the Summit, with efforts to create Temporary Autonomous Zones, liberated territories throughout the city.
>
> CLAC and CASA have developed a series of proposals about the actions themselves that we would like you to consider. [*She begins translating from a page in French*]:
>
> On Thursday, April 19th, we are proposing a spokescouncil at 3PM, of everyone who's here by that time, to finalize details of the action. That same night, we are proposing we hold a torchlight parade. This will be a Green action, our goal is not to be arrested before the 20th, but to welcome the Summit, as it were. We just want to specify again: this is a demo, not a confrontation. It will stop as soon as the cops appear. Just a way to say "hi" and begin to mobilize our people. Those are the only goals for that day.
>
> [*Various people have questions.*]
>
> *Facilitator*: Can we go through the whole schedule and only then go to questions?
>
> *Celine*: On Friday the 20th, the Carnival Against Capitalism march will assemble on the Plains of Abraham at noon, and then people can choose where we go. At roughly 2PM, everyone will disperse into their own blocs and types

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[1] For clarity I will place the names or designations of facilitators or other official speakers in Italics.

of action; there may be a march but we have not organized one yet because we don't know what the security situation will be like.

Now, bear in mind: everything we're presenting here can be modified. These are just proposals. Right now, we are also proposing that at 6PM Friday the 20th we hold an assembly to go over the day's events and plan for the next.

On Saturday the 21st, we will participate in the big labor demo as an explicitly anti-capitalist contingent. We will however, respect the organizers' parameters during the march. So, this is not, itself, an occasion for direct action.

That evening, a lot of demos and diverse actions could go on, and of course jail solidarity actions.

Sunday the 22nd will be the same: there will be space for different actions, but also for prison solidarity.

So… back to the 20th. What CLAC and CASA have sort of organized is two different demos, Yellow and Green. If you look at the handout, you will see, on the right of page two, both proposals. Both assume the existence of a free zone, in which there will be very limited risk of arrest [*some skeptical laughter*], a place for Green, creative demos. It will be a fixed location, a free place where everything will be beautiful. At the moment, assuming we assemble on the Plains of Abraham at noon, we have two possibilities. It's a little vague because we don't know where exactly the security perimeter will be, but basically, one is that the Yellow Bloc will break out of the Plains and march directly to carry out a carnivalesque action in front of the security perimeter; the second is that we begin together with the Green Bloc on the Plains of Abraham and carry out a much longer march which would snake through the city, allowing the Green Bloc to split off, and then arrive in the same place some hours later.

In either case, the ultimate goal is a gigantic, marvelous carnival, with both small affinity group actions and bigger collective ones—we need all of you!

Oh yes, and for the longer, march—we could also rearrange its path depending on smaller actions, to be in solidarity with them.

Again, we urge people to respect different blocs and decisions of people taking part to ensure a level of unity and solidarity.

Question: During the breakout sessions we are having after, could you ensure there's one person from either CLAC or CASA's action committee in each workshop to answer questions?

Celine: Yes, we've already arranged for that.

Facilitator: So, does anyone have any clarifying questions about any of these proposals? We will be alternating between men and women.

There were, of course any number of questions: about the actual extent of the security perimeter, roads from the airport, the possibility of pre-emptive arrests during the Thursday torchlight parade. (Answer: this sounds like an important concern, but we're doing clarifying questions now.) Was the organizing committee aware that the official opening of the Summit might be moved to 1PM?

> Man: I'm puzzled. What sort of solidarity can the Red Bloc expect from the other blocs? It seems like this whole issue is being left out. I need to report back to people in Toronto and I have no idea what to tell them.
>
> [*Lesley to me: "That's my question too."*]
>
> ...as they'll be the ones needing support. It seems to me this whole bloc idea needs to be fleshed out a bit more.
>
> *Celine*: I agree we need to do this. That's why we're here.
>
> *Facilitator*: I don't want to be a castrator [*laughter*] but we have twelve people on stack, this is the time set aside for the technical questions on the plan of action, not theoretical questions.

The problem was that it was almost impossible to answer any of the technical questions without having a more precise idea what this color scheme would look like on the ground. And clearly it had not been thoroughly hashed out.

> Man: A point of clarification. The Green and Yellow Blocs have specific marches. Do I understand the Red does not?
>
> *Celine*: Yes. CLAC and CASA are working on organizing the Green and Yellow Blocs, but the Red Bloc actions should be discussed in small affinity groups, not general assemblies of two hundred people like this.
>
> Woman: In the introduction, you referred to the blocs not as geographical entities, but as attitudes. But a lot of the questions I've been hearing make it sound like they really are going to be separate groups in separate places. Is this just a product of confusion? Or has this been completely worked out? [*A pause as the facilitator asks for more detailed translation*.] That is to say, if the Red Bloc were near the perimeter in a geographical sense, and the Yellow Bloc wanted to do some kind of nonviolent direct action... well, clearly, people will want to do that near the perimeter too. So it raises a question about the zones. Will we be dividing up the map of the city by color?
>
> *Celine*:: Well, the Green Bloc *will* be geographically delimited. It will be relatively far away from the perimeter.
>
> *Nicole* [*a CASA person, the one who was in New York, steps in to clarify*]: The Yellow Bloc will be more mobile than the Green, delimited not so much in space as in the types of action it can engage in. The best way we've found to help those who intend to be in the Red Bloc is to organize the Green and Yellow

> as best we can, so the people who'll want to do Red will know our plans and arrange to do their actions elsewhere.
>
> Woman: The problem as I see it is, if Red and Yellow Blocs are mobile and defined by attitude, how will people know what Bloc they're even in? Will there be separate marches, armbands, some equivalent of marshals who can tell you?
>
> *Nicole*: That's definitely something we should try to clarify. Remember: Yellow doesn't confront, but is defensive. But that also depends on the attitude the cops take. If the police carry out an all-out assault, if they begin attacking everyone indiscriminately, then presumably everyone could end up in the middle of a de facto Red zone.
>
> *Celine*: We cannot make any absolute assurances to anyone about what anyone else will be doing. But we'd like people to call out what sort of actions and demos they intend to be carrying out, what color code best fits that, and will expect them to try to stay that color as well as they can. But we know Yellow can slip into Red.
>
> *Nicole*: I'll add that this is where affinity groups become crucial. If this happens your affinity group could decide collectively to leave the area. Communication will be very important here.

Conversation continued in a similar vein for another fifteen minutes. No one was quite sure what all this would really look like, and it seemed the planners had left large parts of the picture intentionally vague. The CLAC plan was, essentially, to solicit our collective advice to fill in the details. Hence, the structure of the meeting. After the first plenary, where we just got to ask clarifying questions, we were to break up at noon into randomly selected smaller groups of roughly twenty people each. These smaller groups would be given the same list of issues to discuss; each would be provided with someone from the CLAC or CASA planning team to answer informational questions. The results would be written down and serve as a resource for the local working groups. Finally, everyone at the session would explain what role their affinity group was planning on taking on during the actions themselves: whether they were coming as artistic groups, support groups, flying squads, and so on. These would be used as the basis for a second round of breakouts, in which everyone would get to coordinate things with representatives of other affinity groups intending to do roughly the same thing. After that, we'd go home for the evening and hold a final plenary Sunday afternoon.

Lunch was on the fly. We grabbed plates, scooped out some sort of large casserole and salad, a cup of cider, and took it with us to the rooms where the breakouts were being held downstairs. We were mostly assigned different rooms, of course, though somehow Lynn and I both ended up in the same one: Group Five.

12:10PM, First Breakout Session

Downstairs were a whole series of small rooms that had the feel of seminar rooms, big tables, fluorescent lights, mostly without windows.

I will include a fairly long extract from my notes here. Hopefully, they'll convey something of the texture of a consensus meeting—particularly, of the somewhat swirling quality conversation takes when stacking speakers ensures participants rarely reply directly to one another's points, and discussion seems to circle around its object rather than immediately attacking it. What follows is pretty typical of such discussions. I will label individuals roughly as they appeared in my notes, since for the most part, I did not write down their actual names. Also, though the conversation was bilingual, with translations provided—I'll restrict myself here to English, only providing the translations of statements originally made in French.

According to my notes, Group Five originally consisted of twelve men and ten women, though two more women later drifted in. The CLAC person assigned to our room was named Radikha, a willowy young woman of South Asian descent. She was already seated as I came in, chatting with a friend who worked with the Toronto IMC.

> *Radikha*: So, the facilitators have asked each group to consider three questions in this first break-out session. First, the protection of the Convergence Center. Second, the attitudes each bloc (Red, Green, and Yellow) will take towards the police. Finally, what sort of actions your affinity group is thinking it will take part in.
>
> Bob*:* Hi, I'm Bob from the Toronto IMC. Is it okay if I facilitate, so as to leave Radikha available for answering questions?
>
> *Radikha*: That would be just fine with me. I guess then I can be the note-taker, too, since the organizers want to have a record of everything each group comes up with.
>
> Meredith: Also, do we want to set time limits on each agenda item?
>
> [*Many nods and affirmative noises*]
>
> Should we select a time keeper, then, or does everyone have a watch? [*Various people do not have watches*]
>
> Another Woman [*to Meredith*]: Would you be willing to do it?
>
> Meredith: All right then, I'll be time keeper.
>
> *Facilitator*: So, what do we have, until 1PM? That's forty-five minutes. Shall we say ten minutes for the Convergence Center question? [*To Radikha*] Is there any background we should know?
>
> *Radikha*: Well, within CLAC, we came to a decision to create a Convergence Center, a place to hold meetings and for people coming in from out of town.

We also decided to organize some kind of defense in case the police attack. The question is how to organize that, and how to let people who want to leave get out. For example, will there be surveillance outside? And… well, also I guess some of us have been talking about some sort of surveillance inside to prevent police provocations inside the Center. How do we organize this? We don't have much experience with these things and we were hoping some of you might be able to help.

[*The facilitator is taking stack as various people around the table catch his eye, nod slightly, or otherwise indicate they wish to be put on the speaker's list. He calls on people, pointing mostly, since few of us know each other's names.*]

Woman: So, CLAC did make a decision. Now you just need some advice?

Older Guy: My question is: before we talk about vigilance and protection, shouldn't we also be talking about decentralization? What exactly is going to be happening at the Convergence Center? Are people there going to be covering everything from finding people housing to press conferences to food or providing art spaces? And if so, is it tactically wise to concentrate all those functions in one place?

French Guy: When will the Convergence Center actually be set up? [*We all start looking at the handout, but there's no indication.*]

Radikha: In response to the centralization question: by "Convergence Center" we mean a meeting place to hold spokescouncils, also to welcome people, place them in housing, that sort of thing. We haven't decided what other functions the place might serve. As for the date, we don't know that yet, but it certainly will be up and running by Wednesday the 18th.

Younger French Guy: What about the giant puppets? Will they be made in the same place?

Radikha: I think some smaller puppets may be made there, but the larger puppets will be someplace else.

Facilitator: This is a small group so I'm not going to be using the strict one man, one woman rule here, but I'll still try to maintain gender equity. So let me skip ahead in the stack now… the woman in the red scarf?

Red Scarf: My affinity group is intending to give direct action trainings before the Summit: will it be possible to do that at the Convergence Center?

Radikha: I imagine the Convergence Center will be available for trainings.

American: At J20 [the inaugural protests], we had not one but a series of very decentralized Convergence Centers, and that worked really well. Also we had signs up everywhere saying "No Drugs or Bombs Allowed," that sort of thing, which apparently—I know it sounds stupid—makes it a little harder for the police legally to just crash in. Also, we were very careful about hiding the puppet warehouse.

Radikha: So, I'm hearing a lot of concerns about the puppets. Do you think we should have an entirely separate place for puppet-making?

Lynn: I'm actually fearful about using the inauguration protests as our model. At the inauguration, it was pretty clear the police didn't want arrests; several cops actually told me that after they detained me.

Someone: If they didn't want arrests, why did they detain you?

Lynn: I took off my clothes at the inaugural ball with a slogan across my chest. But even then they just let me go after half an hour or so.

Someone else: Jeez, how did you get tickets to the inaugural ball?

Facilitator: Um, maybe we should bring ourselves back to the proposal: what shall we do about defense and evacuation?

Anglophone Guy: It seems a little silly to devote a lot of resources to defending an empty building, Maybe it's important—if we really do want to defend this space—to ensure there'll be something going on there all the time, I mean, when the spokes aren't meeting. Otherwise, you'd just be tying people down. Perhaps we could offer continual trainings, for example.

[*Brief problems with translation. We pause to make sure the French speakers on one side of the room are caught up.*]

French Guy: It seems to me that the major reason law enforcement has invaded convergence spaces in the US is to destroy the art and puppets, so as to kill the message the protesters wish to convey. They haven't messed much with spokescouncils or meetings. So it seems to me what's really important is to defend the puppet space—wherever that will be—and if the puppets aren't being built in the Convergence Center, then maybe we shouldn't be defending it at all.

Facilitator: Can I just check for consensus: we seem to be talking about how and what to defend, not whether…? So: are we agreed on that? Any disagreement that we do in fact want to defend the space? That this is even a priority?

Suzette: My name is Suzette and I'm with the student movement. We're going to be on strike during the Summit, and we need our people in our own space…

Facilitator: I'm sorry, Suzette, we still have a stack here. You're talking out of turn.

Suzette: Oh, sorry. I guess I'm just saying sure, let's defend the space, but don't expect the Québec Student Movement to be able to dedicate any resources to this.

Second French Guy: I like the idea of ensuring people will be able to leave if the place is besieged. But: is it a Yellow defense or a Red?

Facilitator: Can I have a time check here?

Meredith: We're actually fifteen or twenty minutes over time already.

Facilitator: And we have five people left on stack. Shall we make these the last comments and then move on?

[*nods*]

Red Scarf: Can't we make some of the puppets in the Convergence Center, and some elsewhere? Just to be on the safe side?

[*General twinkling*][2]

Facilitator: So it seems we have consensus on that.

[*More twinkling. Radikha is scribbling rapidly.*]

Lynn: In LA, we made a very successful legal move beforehand to defend the Convergence Center. We knew that, when the cops attacked our spaces in Philly and DC, their excuse was that the places were fire hazards, so that was part of our defense: we asked people not to bring certain things, which they could say were fire hazards, but most of all, we got legal assurances beforehand that they wouldn't come in.

Francophone Guy with Sideburns: Wait a minute: are you actually suggesting we could get an order of protection from a judge, and that would make it legally impossible for them to make a preemptive attack like they did, say, on the puppets in Philadelphia?

Lynn: There was a legal injunction.

American: I really can't see how that could work. After all, at A16 and Philly, the cops didn't exactly say, "We think this is a fire hazard" and close us down. They claimed there were molotovs and bombs inside. It's not like there actually were any. They just lied. So, I don't see why we're assuming that whether we actually have anything dangerous in there has anything to do with it.

Facilitator: I think we're having serious process problems here. People are jumping stack and anyway we're long since over time. Radikha, do you have an answer to his question? Has anyone looked into legal possibilities?

Radikha: Actually, no. We haven't looked into any of that yet, since we've been too busy locating a space. Anyway, the laws are different here.

Meredith: Maybe we should have legal people on hand. In Philly, there weren't any legal people around when they attacked the puppet space—and, anyway, the puppet space was a huge warehouse out in the middle of nowhere with no other buildings anywhere nearby, so there was no way to do a blockade. So, if you're still looking for a space, that might be something to think about. We can also make sure there's material for a lockdown on hand here. Also: a way to get the media down there immediately if something happens.

New Englander: You do realize we've only got twenty minutes left for the

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[2] "Twinkling"is a term used for raising one's hands and jiggling one's fingers, widely used in anarchist circles as a way of indicating silent approval for a statement or proposal in a meeting. Reputedly it is derived from sign language for applause.

> whole session and we still haven't got off question number one? I'd also like to suggest that the language being used here—Red, Yellow, the vagueness—is a real impediment to action. Perhaps, for the sake of time, we should just come to consensus about what we'll actually do if the cops do attack us. That might actually help us move on to the next topic—wasn't it supposed to be, attitudes towards the police in the different blocs? Come to think of it, we really should have addressed that first, then moved on to talking about the Convergence Center.
>
> *Radikha*: Well, the organizers sort of took it for granted we wouldn't really be able to do all this in an hour. I want to add that Yellow is supposed to be characterized by a "defensive attitude": blockading is Yellow. If your group does not intend to respond to police orders, you're Yellow. Of course, your affinity group can decide for itself how to act when cops attack, there's no code saying "all Yellow affinity groups have to do this." Red is more… targeted.
>
> Older Guy: Though not necessarily violent.
>
> *Radikha*: No, not necessarily.
>
> Red Scarf: In the interest of moving on, I propose we classify the Convergence Defense as Yellow. You know, technically, we're not supposed to be planning Red actions here anyway.

By 12:45, we concluded that this was about as far as we could go without even knowing where the Center was going to be or what it was going to be used for, so we finally moved on to defining the blocs. One woman said her affinity group was intending to come with plexiglass shields. Would this still count as Yellow? Radikha assured her it would, since shields are by definition defensive. Lynn claimed that, in America, cops had definitely been known to interpret defensive gear as weapons.

The problem with the blocs, it turned out, was whether to interpret them geographically. A Green zone made no sense unless it was physically separate. You need to give people a safe space, far enough from the action that they're not in danger of being mistaken for combatants, close enough that they're clearly part of the same event. To mark off a specific space for a red zone, on the other hand, would be clearly suicidal. You might as well put up sign saying 'police, here are the ones to arrest.' So we were stuck with one Green zone, in some specific area out of the action, and the rest of the city a vast Yellow zone, any part of which might turn Red at any time. But if so how would it be possible for anyone to do classic civil disobedience? You can't claim to be engaging in a nonviolent sit-in if, at any time, someone else might pass by and chuck a brick over your head. Out of a sense of obligation to our Trotskyite friend, I suggested that perhaps certain zones, maybe of a block or two, might be set aside for purely Yellow actions. I was a bit startled to hear loud and vehement objections. For a couple of minutes, I found myself cast as the reactionary, with many of the local activists—including the woman from the Student Movement—angrily rejecting any notion that Red tactics would be declared off limits, anywhere. I withdrew the suggestion: "Well, probably groups will simply cluster spontaneously. Maybe we don't need to actually formalize any of this."

Facilitator: Let's move to the third question: specific action ideas. Anyone have any objections to just doing a go-round here? [*None are indicated*]

Suzette: We're not supposed to be talking about Red stuff here?

Facilitator: Yeah, that's my understanding of the situation. Only actions we would be able to discuss in a completely public space.

Older Guy: I'm with the Pagan Cluster, which is concentrated in Vermont, and we've come up with a proposal for an action based on the Cochabamba statement, about access to water as a basic human right. We want to create a Living River of people that can flow through different zones in the city, trying to cause as much disruption as possible as it does so. That might include actions around the central zone near the wall, where we assume things will turn the reddest, but it's basically a Yellow sort of action we have in mind here.

Radikha: I'll skip my turn as basically I'm going to spend the weekend doing support work for protesters. (You know, I'm with CLAC.)

Olive (French student with rainbowish hair): I don't know if my affinity group will be doing an action or support.

Sideburns: We want to disturb the summiteers as much as possible. We have nothing specific beyond that yet, but we've been throwing around the idea of blockading the highway to the city.

Jane: My name's Jane. I'm actually spoking for two different groups. One group is from Carleton University and will be doing disruptive street theater—clowning sorts of things. We'll show up and wander around, and we have these little skits we can put on the moment we see something. The other group is the SSSA, from Ontario. That's a group of secondary school students. They'll be doing drumming with found instruments and blockade sorts of thing.

English Guy: I'm representing two affinity groups based in the University of Toronto that are also doing theatrical skits, but want to be in the Yellow Bloc, not the Green. Also, in Toronto, we have the Guerilla Rhythm Squad. Some of them want to get involved in any possible airport actions but don't know if those are still on.

David: I'm with New York City Ya Basta! We have four or five ideas for action scenarios, none of which can be discussed here. Well, I guess there's one we can discuss. Some of us had an idea to come out, suited up in our padding and chemical jumpsuits, and get a really large ladder, and just kind of wander around with it right next to the wall. If nothing else, it would work as a diversion. We find that whenever we show up in the suits, cops tend to follow us wherever we go.

Young Québécois Woman: I represent a popular neighborhood committee in the neighborhood of St. Jean Baptiste—this is a neighborhood that is going to be cut in half by the wall. We're planning a series of actions on the 17th and 18th having to do with that. Can we discuss those here?

Facilitator: Sure, why not?

Young Québécois Woman: Well, this is still in the planning stage, but one idea is that people in the neighborhood will save their garbage for a week, and then throw it along the wall to show this is what consumer society produces. And there are two more. One is putting lines of old clothing along the perimeter (the theme of waste again), the other is noise. So as to disrupt the Summit, twice a day everyone will put on music as loud as possible—something really annoying, and all at once, to try to drive the delegates crazy.

Young Francophone Guy: We are planning to take part in border actions at Akwesasne, but nothing concrete beyond that.

Plexiglass Guy: My collective in Toronto is organizing communities to do massive border actions, too. After that we're coming to Québec with our shield wall. We might actually help with the Convergence Center defense if people really do end up needing that.

Lynn: I'm with Rainforest Relief in New York. We have some people coming from Ecuador, Nicaragua, who can talk about the potential effects of the FTAA on their communities. We're hoping to do a panel and then take them up to the Mohawk action—though I'm worried whether we'd be putting them in danger if we actually try to cross. In Québec itself… well, my hope is that we rush the wall in some way. Maybe completely nonviolently. I have this very powerful image in my head from the movie *Gandhi* of all those people marching up to the soldiers, and getting clubbed down, but then, more people keep coming and though each one ends up getting hit, they just keep coming anyway… Or maybe like that except we're climbing.

Bob: I'll also be doing Indymedia, covering the heavier actions.

Man in Blue Bandana: I represent Québec Medical, and we'll be giving support before, during, and after the actions. We are trying to work with people to make sure we have medics at each of the border actions as well, but that's a little more complicated.

Older Woman: I'm also from the Vermont Mobilization. Our aim is to move folks across the border, but we're also trying to come up with scenarios for what to do with people if they don't make it.

Facilitator: Okay, time's up.

Someone asks if we are also supposed to be discussing the march: whether we're going directly from the Plains of Abraham or snaking through the city for an hour first? "Well, no," says Radikha, "but it looks like a lot of breakout sessions are still going on (yes, we flagrantly lied about the time). People aren't going upstairs yet, so we could certainly talk about that a little if people want to." Sentiment is clearly leaning towards the longer march (is it really a good idea to have everyone about to do a direct action assemble and just hang out in one place for several hours before they do anything?), when someone comes downstairs to tell us the breakout sessions are over.

In the hall, I run into Lesley. We compare notes. Most of her session was also wasted on meandering discussions of Red and Yellow. Only at the end did anything useful come out. Dean had a similar experience. Emma appears to have vanished. As I head upstairs, several people point me out as the Ya Basta! delegate—I'm getting the definite impression there's a feeling this is going to be the big new innovation for this action: shields and padding and defensive tactics. (As it turns out they're wrong; it won't be. But it was kind of fun being a de facto celebrity.)

1:45PM, Back to the Plenary

A brief, abortive effort to find myself a cup of coffee ended when I remembered I still didn't have any Canadian money, and there were no obvious ATMs. Still, it gave me a chance to step outside. After hanging out a little in the antechamber, where there had been rumors of a *Montréal Gazette* reporter, I returned to discover the newly rotated facilitators busy synthesizing. Having gone over the written reports from each session, they were now drawing up a list of ten different sorts of action to be addressed in the next breakouts, writing them on huge sheet of butcher paper taped to one wall, sparking occasional chuckles at some of the evocative not-quite-English circumlocutions:

1) **Festive and Arts groups**
2) **Protectors of the Convergence Center**
3) **Blockaders of Streets and Boulevards**
4) **Blockaders of Outside Specific Buildings**
5) **Occupations of Buildings**
6) **Walking/Advancing on/Visiting/Moving towards the Wall**
7) **Redecoration of the Urban Scenery**
8) **Food and the Reappropriation of Different Things**
9) **Flying Squads/Support Groups**

Halfway through, a woman from the Pagan Bloc asks "can I propose one more? I think you've heard our proposal for a Living River…"

"Would that not be considered a kind of flying squad?"

"No, it's not a flying squad. It's a whole bloc unto itself."

"All right then." He writes:

10) Riviere Humaine

The facilitators are trying to get some sense of the consensus on the Convergence Center and color attitude questions; tell us if anyone absolutely missed lunch there's still some food on the table; and then introduce representatives of various working groups: Legal and Medical, Housing and Finance.

The Legal collective (they seem to consist mainly of English-speaking students from McGill) handed out information sheets and explained that each affinity group should name one member to serve as legal contact. That person should strive to avoid arrest, and keep track of where everyone is at all times. They said the legal contact should probably attend at least one legal training, especially if they come from the US, as laws are different here. This is also the person who knows what needs to be taken care of if any member of their affinity group is arrested: who'll need someone to feed their cat, lie to their boss, etc. They will be adopting the system used at mass action in the US: members of each affinity group will be asked to fill out a form registering their real names—or at least, some letters of their real names—along with their action names, and these papers will be guarded assiduously by the legal team. That way they'll be able to keep track of who's in jail as the names come in, and make the information available on a special legal phone number. "And don't everyone call at once about people missing if there's a mass arrest! Only your legal contact person should call the number."

Someone asks: "Does this mean we're not doing jail solidarity? Should we bring IDs or is everyone going to be refusing to give their names once arrested? A lot of this hasn't been completely worked out yet."

The medics explain that no one should assume that, if injured, they will be able to rely on official paramedics and ambulances. Usually ambulances will refuse to go anywhere near an action. Therefore, the medical team will be providing three levels of medical infrastructure during the action: a clinic with trained professionals, probably somewhere near the IMC; several street teams of experienced action medics with proficiency in first aid, hypothermia treatment, and dealing with tear gas and pepper spray, and, finally, each affinity group should name one person as their own medical monitor and make sure that person attends at least one medical training.

As questions begin I step out into the antechamber, do a quick interview with a reporter in exchange for a cup of coffee, take a stroll outside. We've been meeting for five or six hours. When I stroll back in, Jaggi, representing the financial team, is explaining the organizers are currently about $20,000.00 in the red. Then, they ask for volunteers to facilitate the next round of breakout groups. I end up in the "approaching the wall" group (assuring myself this is because that's what my affinity group is intending to do and has nothing to do with the fact the facilitator, a young blonde woman looks strikingly like a punk rock version of Buffy the Vampire Slayer). Dean joins me—along with Emma, who has spent most of the session making friends with some Black Bloc types on the other side of the circle. Lesley says she's going to cruise out with Lynn to find the place where she's supposed to stay.

4:30PM, Breakout Session

The final meeting of the day was a little frustrating. In theory, it was the most militant session—though we still couldn't discuss militant tactics explicitly. It was also a strange mix: there were twenty-six of us (fifteen men, eleven women, as I duly set down in my notebook), mainly anarchists but also including representatives of the ISO, IAC, and other Marxist types with whom anarchists don't usually feel comfortable discussing militant actions. Everyone seemed a little uncertain how much they could say. Spokescouncils are by definition not truly secure environments, most of us didn't know each other. Anyone might be a cop.

We start by examining our maps. A local woman in her forties with green streaks in her hair and a prominent nose ring explained some of the background for out of towners:

> Punk Woman: I'm not sure how large the perimeter is going to be. When they first announced it, it was going to be 2.8 kilometers but now it seems to have become smaller. We've been asked to stay away from the zones marked 2 and 6, which is a working-class neighborhood called St. John Baptiste where the local community group has come out in strong support of us, but is also hoping to avoid any provocations that might cause the police to tear gas their neighborhood.
>
> Zones 4, C, and B will be the most difficult areas as there's in effect a natural stone wall, with cliffs all around. We can pretty much forget about approaching the wall from there..
>
> If there is anyone here who knows this part of the city better than I do, they should probably step forward to help us. But I think we all agree that coming in through a working-class neighborhood that will be hurt by the FTAA should be scratched off. So, that pretty much leaves Zone 3, an approach from the west. The problem is that zone is also going to have the most police as it's the main entrance.

Grey Beard: Yes, it's going to have to be Zone 3. If we're going to attack the fence, I'd assume that would be in a fairly large group. Not only are all the other areas less easily accessible, there's no place to retreat (even if we could get up on the cliffs, we couldn't run down them again if the police started pushing us back). Areas C and B are below the river—no place to retreat either—so maybe only Zone 3 is physically possible?

Facilitator: [*also staring at her map*] …which is the one where these big streets are?

Grey Beard: Yes, I think so.

Someone: That's the northwest section of the wall?

Someone else: Will there be many entrances to the perimeter, or just one or two?

Facilitator: They said there would be nine but they haven't announced where they'll be yet.

Craig [*anarchist type with giant earplugs*]: Do we know what kind of fence it's going to be?

Someone: Not for sure. We know it's going to be a chain-link fence with concrete base, and then barbed wire on top. A small stretch of it has already been put up on the Plains of Abraham, near the cliffs, but I'm not sure if anyone has seen it yet.

Suzette: Zone 3 was the site of a big demo and battle last year around this same time of year, around school reform. It ended with a pretty big victory for us in an open field. I heard Zone E is Touristville, if anything should go wrong it should be there, perhaps between residential areas

Punk Woman: Hitting two places at same time might be a good strategic move, also, if we're talking about Zone 3… might it be easier to advance on (what kind of language are we actually allowed to use here? Visit? Attack?) a place where the wall opens and closes. Another possibility might be not to actually attack the fence at all but to shut down the main entrance; maybe by locking down to it. That would effectively shut the cops in and away from the rest of us. A third option (perhaps something to do at a different location) might be to get grappling hooks and actually haul the fence down with lots of people. Would that be possible? I don't actually know if the concrete part will be cemented to the ground but probably it won't be.

Lesley: Not until now!!

[*Much laughter and glancing up at invisible microphones in the ceiling*]

Young French Girl: Do we know if the security forces will completely surround the fence? Or might there be gaps in their lines?

Grey Beard: Well, we know there'll be five thousand riot police to protect maybe two, maybe three kilometers of fence. I'm not sure how that translates.

> Presumably they won't be evenly dispersed, They'll have large units at the gates, small squads here and there
>
> *Facilitator*: Does anyone have a proposal for anything to put on the formal agenda? Because, you know, we don't actually have an agenda yet.

There seems little point and we decide to keep it informal. So: What would be the best day to try to breach the wall? CLAC has only been talking about Friday, the 20th, but the big labor march was on Saturday and that would be at least forty, fifty thousand people. As always, the union leaders were doing everything possible to keep their people away from the action. The march would begin at a location fairly far away from the Summit and then proceed in the opposite direction. Still, if it would be possible to divert even a fraction of the marchers towards the wall itself, it would completely change the balance of forces. Many people remark on the unlikelihood of such a thing. Since Seattle, union bureaucrats have become remarkably good at ensuring this never happened. Others remark that Canada is different. Finally, we all end up yielding to the authority of an old man in a fisherman's cap and scraggly beard who had been largely silent until now. He explains, in French, that he grew up in the old city, and might have some insights others don't. After a little bit, seeing that the out-of-towners are paying rapt attention, he switches to English:

> Fisherman: It's true, we do not know where the police will be, but we can assume they're not just going to be inside the perimeter—to get near it might be a battle in itself. If so, if we are going to be under fire from tear gas and the like as we approach, I think we should not approach from our own neighborhoods. There are two broad thoroughfares: one is René Lévesque, the other Grand Allée, which runs parallel to its south. These are the streets of the bourgeoisie. They are both streets where top bureaucrats and wealthy people live; so this would be a good area from which to advance on the perimeter.
>
> David: What my affinity group has been wondering is: if by some miracle we do get inside the perimeter on the 20th, well—then what? We've heard talk about disrupting the opening ceremonies, if only by our being there, or somehow cutting off the media control center.
>
> Dean: Once inside, will we be able to mix into the crowds? Will there be guards checking for people with passes?
>
> Fisherman: It's not clear. A lot depends on how much of a threat they think we are [*glancing up again at the imaginary microphone*]. If, after this spokescouncil, they feel the perimeter is insecure, they will make the area smaller, and more easily defensible. As a result, there will be fewer ordinary citizens inside. That will mean they'll be better able to see who's who (that is, there will be more

> suits, less people dressed like us); but, then, we'll be able to see who's who as well. If they end up having to make it a capitalist ghetto, even if that means they can do what they want inside, that in itself is a big victory for us—and an attack on that space, even a purely symbolic one, would be a great victory as well.

Gradually I realized what was going on. As I mentioned, in any such meeting, one had to assume someone in the room was a cop (the references to microphones were mostly a way of being polite). Therefore, the only person who was completely comfortable talking was the one man who actually thought it was tactically advantageous for the police to know our plans. Everyone else was beginning to look increasingly fidgety and uncomfortable. Finally, someone suggested we'd gone about as far as we could, and we broke for dinner; with Emma and some others passing word that those who were really serious about the project, and had someone who could vouch for them, would meet later at the CASA party that night to reconvene. Meanwhile, we will write in our official report that it's too soon to come to any real conclusions, but we need to convene a spokescouncil to plan this specific action a few days before the summit, when we have some idea what things will actually look like.

8:00PM, Scanner Party

The party was held at a place called the Scanner Bistro, a "multimedia club" with an Internet café and bar downstairs, along with a small bandstand. Upstairs there was another bar, a pool table, foosball, a Judge Dredd pinball machine, and scattered monitors and speakers on the wall that enabled one to see and hear whatever live act was on stage downstairs. As our crew came in—about twelve of us from the wall breakout group, including most of the New Yorkers—two women were on stage, performing some sort of spoken-word piece in highly colloquial French. Later, there was a man who I think was a comedian; we were told a band was going to be coming out later, but by that time none of us were paying much attention. We ended up upstairs, looking for a table, because, finally, someone had found a proper map.

Or almost all of us. Dean went straight for the pool table, where he was soon engaged in a long conversation with a lanky, sandy-haired fellow with whom he was, ultimately, to have a tumultuous six-month romance.

We found a spot in the corner, in an area where the free dinner had been earlier. We pushed together a couple tables and made short work of the remaining food, which consisted of a huge tub of rice, a dish with beans and veggies in tomato sauce, and some loaves of French bread and oleo. The vegans wouldn't touch the oleo, but everyone was munching bread for the first half of the parley. Large maps of the city were spread across the surface of the table and taped into place. Everyone huddled, and the parley continued for hours, with pitchers of beer periodically appearing out of nowhere, always to another collective toast of "smash the state!"

It was the perfect meeting, except, perhaps, for the fact that we were right below the speakers, and combined with the ambient noise of dozens of festive conversations, it made it a little difficult to hear. So the real meeting was always the seven or eight people in the center at any given time, who could actually hear each other, usually with several others hanging at the edges waiting to get in. It never took all that long. Someone would always be taking off to fetch beer or smoke a joint or use the bathroom, and then have to wait at the fringes when they came back. Still, we kept it up for something like three hours, a little bubble of activist intensity, almost completely oblivious to the increasingly rambunctious dance party that eventually encompassed us and, later in the evening, began to die away.

It was here we finally planned the attack on the wall. It didn't take long to go through the possibilities. Even if it did prove possible to enter the security zone, there was no obvious thing to do once we were inside. A banner hang would be possible, but it would probably require the collaboration of homeowners inside the perimeter—there doubtless would be some, but they could hang the banners themselves. We could occupy a building, but it would lead to absolutely certain arrest, and it was not clear what would be the point. There was only one thing for it. We had to destroy the wall. Doing so would be utterly legitimate. We would be providing a public service. The heads of every state in the Americas were coming to this city to set up fences right through people's neighborhoods; we anarchists were coming to take them down. The question was how, and most of the next three or four hours was spent going over possibilities: grappling hooks, wire clippers, tactics, tools, diversions, angles of approach. Normal wire clippers are not, in fact, strong enough to cut through the chain-links of a security fence; they are, however, strong enough to sever the wires that connect the chain-links to the upright posts. Once severed, it was a matter of weight: at least one person had to climb to the top of the fence and lean backwards as others pulled. Alternately, fences could be taken down by a small team armed with grappling hooks and cables. Probably the best approach would be not to start all in the same place. We should have several columns. Ideally, three, each with their own peculiar tactics. Ya Basta! could come down one big avenue, the Black Bloc down the next, the CLAC/CASA people (none of whom were actually present) down a third. Each would thus approach a different section of the fence, but all be in sight of one another. Each would also have its own particular style: the CLAC people more militant, Ya Basta! more silly, Black Bloc more mobile. Members of Toronto and Montréal Ya Basta!—two groups of which I had hitherto heard only the vaguest rumors—promised to lead any other Yabbas into action, since they knew the territory.

In fact, we discovered that there would be four different Ya Basta! contingents: the two from Canada, one from New York, and one from Connecticut. The latter was represented by a young woman who everyone just knew as "Kitty from Connecticut," a music student at Connecticut College, who I knew as an activist with the CGAN (the Connecticut Global Action Network). Kitty had just gotten into town and had missed most of the spokes, but gravitated directly to the Scanners meeting. I was really gratified to see her; she was a talented facilitator and all-around impressive activist (CGAN had already scored two major victories, over the last year: the first when they blockaded downtown Hartford with an alliance between anarchists and janitors, the second when they almost single-handedly managed to force Hartford airport to settle a strike with their restaurant workers, by proposing an action to support the picket line, which apparently left management convinced they were about to face a hoard of rampaging Black Bloc'ers.) At the moment, though, she was mainly interested in finding someone who could roll her a joint. She disappeared, someone from the Prince Edwards Islands slid into her chair, and Sasha, fresh from the IMC, took the position that person had had sitting on a nearby table.

The conference continued. If American Ya Basta! didn't manage to get through the border, we'd have to reduce it to two columns. We kept having to remind each other though that we probably wouldn't be able to just walk up to the fence; we'd more likely have to have to fight our way up the last three blocks to even get in a position to start using wire cutters. And once we were there we'd need at least four to six minutes to bring down a fence. So, the plan would only work if larger numbers of other protesters join us. Probably what would end up happening was that half the Yellow Bloc would be inspired to join in, the other half run away. Whether there would be enough of them to let us fight our way to the wall depended on the total numbers and no one had any clear idea what those numbers were likely to be. Columns might be anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand. Really it all depended on the local students. They certainly seemed militant enough. But would they come through?

By about 1AM, after what must have been the sixteenth round of "smash the state!," we ended up composing a call to action—called, since it had a certain ring, "the Scanner Accords." It began: "We are all calling for everyone who feels hemmed in by walls to come to Québec City." Only a paragraph, really, but somehow it was only by releasing it that the meeting seem complete. We wrote out five or six sentences, on a sheet of paper, edited it collectively, posted the text anonymously on an IMC web page somewhere in the United States, with a note saying it was to be forwarded everywhere. Then, we went outside and set the sheet on fire. Sasha offered to film the ritual, but someone objected, just in case high-tech means could be used to gather fingerprints from the close-ups of our hands.

(This seemed to almost everyone else kind of ridiculous, but one learns that, on matters of "security culture," it is usually best not to argue.) We went home agreeing to meet at 1PM the next afternoon, as the spokescouncil was winding down, to investigate the areas where the first advance on the wall was likely to take place.

CONSULTA DAY 2:
Sunday, March 25

Our group slept through the official CLAC/CASA tour of the city, which was supposed to be in the morning, but we managed to make it over to the spokes by around 11:00AM—for a change, just as it was getting under way. (Actually it was supposed to have started at 10AM but we seemed to be dealing with a serious case of "activist time.") Numbers were smaller than the day before, but not much. Lesley, Dean, Lynn, and I reconstructed our little nest—now with Sasha and Kitty joining us—Emma was off with her new Black Bloc friends. The CLAC team had rotated too: Jaggi was no longer translator, but was actually facilitating this time, along with an older woman I hadn't seen before.

11:00AM, Plenary Meeting

The meeting began with report-backs from the breakout sessions the night before; afterwards, we would consider a series of concrete proposals. The report-backs are worth documenting, I think, because they give some sense of how, through such open-ended and sometimes apparently unproductive discussions, action plans really can take form. In each case, the idea was to create a summary of ideas that spokes could take back to their affinity groups across North America to see which they would like to develop and plug into, and to provide the means to stay in touch with one another (usually by email).

> **1) The "festive artsy sort of group"**
>
> We decided to make sure there were events happening all over the city. One idea: to have festive performances that would support blockades without actually being a part of them. Another was to turn the wall into a sort of art show (um, before it was attacked that is). We can animate, decorate it. We spoke about the need to make very large objects like puppets well beforehand, and to ensure we have a space in which to do this. As for supplies: fabric, scraps, a lot of things can be made out of found objects. We're asking everyone to start putting aside anything they find that can be used for costumes, props, or construction projects.
>
> We'd also like to make a couple small points: we heard a lot of ideas about drumming, street theater, puppets; we're expecting a lot of that. Some suggested

the idea of perhaps also sectioning off some area for an ongoing silent or unmoving vigil, to represent the voices that are silenced by this kind of summit.

2) Protectors of the Convergence Center

We decided Convergence Center defense is indeed a priority, and that we'll employ three methods:

a) continual surveillance inside and outside
b) organizing evacuations of people and materials if attacked
c) organizing active resistance to any police provocation or attack.

3–4) Blockading groups

In the end, it didn't seem to make any sense to have two different blockade working groups, so we merged.

Most of us are in favor of blockading highways, but we're not at the point of being able to make concrete proposals as to which. There is also the question of how to bring up the kind of equipment (for example, lockboxes) that would be necessary to maintain a really effective blockade. The border is a big problem for people from the US who would otherwise have access to such things; also CLAC/CASA is too busy to organize this. We suggest affinity groups should make arrangements in advance with friends elsewhere in Canada, for instance the Maritimes, to get things delivered—if they were sent here, they would probably be intercepted. We decided that the city should be divided into zones, to ensure that everything is covered.

There's also a specific proposal from the GOMM for a plan they have to organize a festive-style blockade with three hundred people or more near the center of the city.

There was some discussion of the possibility of a blockade of the airport, possibly motorcades of some of the heads of state, but no specific proposals were discussed.

Another idea was blockading off particular symbols of capitalism; like trains, or shopping centers. Someone proposed an organizational meeting regarding that at 3:30 this afternoon, after this meeting. It was 3:30, right?

[Woman in Spider-Man T-shirt: 3:30, that's right.]

Finally, there was the idea of blockading some major media outlet and demanding that they play a prepared tape, setting out some of our principle objections to the treaty.

5) Occupations of buildings

There are three colleges here in Québec City and one of them is already occupied by OQP. For the other two, we're discussing whether and how to occupy them.

6) Walking/advancing on/visiting/moving towards the wall

Many affinity groups expressed a desire to pay a visit to the security perimeter. There was clearly a strong willingness to undertake this, and a feeling there were multiple goals to be served by this: to disrupt the perimeter, disrupt the Summit, possibly even penetrate it. But that's about as far as we can go in this context. A lot of information still needs to be clarified, and most of the logistics still need to be worked out. We would have to decide on official visit points and the means to be employed to make any adjustments to the wall that might be required. Shall it be through a mass mobilization, or separate affinity group actions? Since there's so much to be considered, and so much depends on numbers, information as yet unavailable, we suggest that a spokescouncil be convened a few days after the fence is actually put up to make final decisions.

7) Redecoration of the urban furniture

Or, I guess that should properly be, "urban scenery." (There were certain translation problems. Mainly they seem to be referring to the judicious use of spray paint and other artistic materials.) We didn't have a formal meeting, really, but just said hello to each other and then all went off to join other groups. We recommend that these issues be left to each individual affinity group. There's nothing that really needs to be coordinated on a city-wide scale.

8) The reappropriation of food and other items

There are all kinds of means that can be used by the Red, Yellow, and Green Blocs to reclaim things. Our idea is to do some advance scouting of potential sites for food commandos (*commando du boeuf*). A Food Manifesto will be written to explain why this type of action is taking place.

As a sidenote: Montréal Food Not Bombs is currently preparing a large amount of food that will be frozen and brought in for a collective feast, perhaps to be held underneath the highway on Friday or Saturday night.

9) Flying squads (*groupes mobiles*)

The purpose of flying squads is to provide support for hot points during the action; also, to take advantage of opportunities that might open up suddenly. All this, of course, depends on having accurate information on what's happening. A comms system is essential, and we're not sure what sort of communications infrastructure (radios? walkie-talkies?) has already been set up. We are imagining numerous relatively small groups of three, four, or five people, well-coordinated with each other. They will decide for themselves which of the three blocs they will be supporting, what calls to respond to. The coordination already being organized.

10) The living river

We decided… well, this action is organized with Vermont pagans. [*There are five of the Pagan Cluster in attendance: four women, one man. Starhawk isn't with them. All of them are sitting, somewhat incongruously, on chairs. They're mostly older, I note, so it might just be bad backs.*] We will be taking the St. Lawrence as

> an ally, and using it, along with generally using water as a theme to represent what we're fighting against and what we're fighting for, as a form that will let us move easily back and forth from one action, or one kind of action, to another.
>
> We are asking people who would like to participate to bring blue material, ribbons, clothing. The idea is to create a sort of Blue Bloc…
>
> [*This is translated. "Oh no! Yet another Bloc," sighs one of the facilitators. Everybody laughs.*]
>
> …that way we won't be stuck to one zone or style of action. People can join, rivulets can split off, streams will flow back together again. If people want to stay at blockade, they can do so; others can perform ceremonies or offer support for other groups.
>
> Male Pagan: If folks want to join, they are encouraged to join affinity groups beforehand. Not necessarily to join as individuals.
>
> Oh, yes: our other theme is free access to water for all people, inspired by the Cochabamba declaration. In consequence, we'll be providing bottled water for everyone, and are encouraging people to bring samples of water from your particular homes to contribute to one great ritual that will take place at the same time as the opening ceremonies of the Summit.
>
> *Facilitator*: We have a very brief period for questions—just five minutes, because otherwise this can go on forever.
>
> Flying Squad Spokesman: Oh, the flying squad group forgot to add: we'll have a listserv, to talk about communications equipment too, as that's very important for this. You can sign up through the CLAC website.
>
> Bearded Man: Also, one idea that came out of our first breakout concerning the Convergence Center was to do like LA and seek a legal injunction stopping the cops and firemen from coming in. We want to make sure Legal is aware of that.
>
> [*Few questions follow, but lots of announcements of listservs being set up, contact information, and so on.*]
>
> *Facilitator*: Let's pass to new proposals, then. I'd like to remind people we have to be out of here by five.

The first proposal was, once again, the Convergence Center defense. It was not clear to any of us why this proposal had to be restated—it was, in fact, the exact same one CLAC had made earlier. Presumably, it was some kind of formality. In theory, each proposal was supposed to be followed by five people speaking in favor, five against, but since no one proved interested in speaking against the proposal, it was considered consensed on and we moved to the next.

The next was much more interesting, because it brought in an element of sharp conflict. It also gives an example of how consensus decision making actually operates (because, despite the formal rules, we were effectively using a system of "modified consensus"), most of all because the conflict never explicitly came to the surface. Objectionable proposals are rarely shot down. Even when any one person in theory has the right to veto ("block") a proposal, it almost never happens: instead, there is a process that could almost be described as killing with kindness.

The proposal was brought forward by a young woman in a big white cable-knit sweater and pink woolen cap:

> Pink Cap: Among the blockade group, we decided it would be really useful to form a tactical committee.
>
> Such a committee would consist of people here willing to come up early, and also, of course, CLAC/CASA folks as well. That way, it would be able to scope out the city as the wall goes up, figure out what hotels, or other important spots need to be hit to disrupt the Summit as much as possible. So, when the various people come to the Convergence Center on Wednesday and Thursday we'll have a plan so we can direct people to the best places where they can make an impact, disrupt, even stop it. That's what the 3:30 meeting will hopefully be so *please* come if you have any insights, or just are willing to help in any way.
>
> *Older Facilitator*: What is the proposal, then? To create such a group? Are you just asking people to come to your meeting or making a formal proposal?
>
> Pink Cap: We feel we need the help of locals to pull this off. So we want to know: is this an idea embraced by the group? Because, if not, we can't do it. The idea is to take account of past experiences, thinking what's worked out and what hasn't at Seattle, in DC, and so on.
>
> *Older Facilitator*: So, on the proposal, are there any clarifying points or questions?
>
> Woman in Rainbow Dreads: Is this a call from one group, or a decentralized call, open to all? Because in CLAC/CASA we have been trying to develop a process that will ensure that not one single group ends up dominating coordination. We feel that's very important.
>
> Pink Cap: We are envisioning different people, people from many affinity groups, people from different parts of the US and Canada, who come together with an idea. It would be like a spin-off of spokescouncil. To ensure that when thousands of people come, we can really close down the city, really make an impact on the Summit.
>
> *Older Facilitator*: I see one more clarifying question.
>
> American Woman: This is not a question, but: if all this is centralized only around street blockades…

> *Jaggi*: Um, we're only asking for clarifying questions at this point.
>
> Another American Woman: Actually, I believe the facilitator called for "clarifying points or questions." So I have one of those, too. This proposal is being made by people who come from the blockade group, and while we all consider that important, we also hope any such committee would take into account the tactics of other affinity groups so as to help us coordinate the action as a whole collectively, without its being centralized. It would be useful if it were a conduit for information, so people know where to get tactical information to make actions as effective as possible.
>
> *Older Facilitator*: Please don't make interventions—we're asking for clarifying points or questions. A question from a man?
>
> Man: All right then, I'd like to clarify whether the committee will just gather information, or make suggestions. Or will it have any other functions? That is, would it have functions other than as an information bank?
>
> Pink Cap: It would be both. So when people come from out of town, they will have some idea where the important places are—as they might not be familiar with the city…
>
> *Older Facilitator*: A question from a woman?
>
> Kitty [*who had her hand up before*]: No, I pass.
>
> *Older Facilitator*: The woman in the grey hat then.
>
> Lesley: I thought there already is an action committee, created locally. I would like to know what their role will be in relation to this new tactical one.
>
> Pink Cap: There's an action committee? Where is it, then?
>
> Nicole: There is an action committee within CLAC/CASA, created to deal with logistics and propose actions. We haven't discussed it yet but if we did we would probably feel we'd be happy to share experiences as it would help us to do our work.
>
> Woman in Spider-Man T-shirt: Yes, I also think it's a great idea.
>
> Pink Cap: I really feel this is something where we can work together to really make an impact on the Summit.

The interesting thing about this conversation is the delicacy with which it was conducted. At the time, I had only an intuition of what was going on. Certainly, I found it a bit odd that the woman making the proposal kept using the same phrases ("really making an impact on the Summit") over and over; and, later, that her chief supporter, the woman in a Spider-Man T-shirt, was using remarkably similar terms. Normally, the word "committee" would have been a tip-off as well. An anarchist would have said "working group," but we were in a foreign environment so it seemed unwise to read too much into word choice. As time went on, it became increasingly clear toes were being stepped on, but such was the nonconfrontational ethos that no one was willing to express the fact directly. Rather, almost all the responses were highly constructive, at least in tone.

> Woman: In the flying squads group, a lot of us observed that in the past, there has been a problem with unreliable information: Flying squads end up going to someplace based on rumors that turn out not to be true. Would this committee give assistance to communications for us?
>
> Spider-Man: Yes, absolutely
>
> Pink Cap: Yes.
>
> Medic in Blue Bandana: And will this committee be responsible to the spokescouncil? If so, how would that work in real terms?
>
> Spider-Man: The answer to first question is yes—it would provide information for whoever's at the spokescouncil. To the second: it depends on who's participating, but judging from previous actions, maybe it will end up dividing the city into sections. So if an affinity group comes and people say, "We want to go do Yellow Bloc, we want to find a blockade, but we won't resist arrest," we can say, "Well, we know they need another fifty people here in this sector." The group can also help facilitate gathering equipment.
>
> *Older Facilitator*: We'll let conversation continue for fifteen minutes, which is the maximum we decided to allow for specific proposals, because at the rate we're going now, it won't be possible to make decisions. Let's move from clarifying questions to concerns.
>
> Eric: I'd actually still like to clarify something. This sounds a lot like what we were talking about in the flying squad group, because people didn't seem to know what was already in place for communications or tactical. We need to figure out somehow how CASA/CLAC tactical and communications and flying squads are all supposed to work together.
>
> Rainbow Dreads Woman: I find the idea of a strategic group interesting, but I want to ensure that there's not a reduplication of work here. CLAC/CASA has recently formed a communications group, so I want to ensure this committee will be just coordinating blockades.
>
> Spider-Man: We invite you to join the group.
>
> Pink Cap: We want to work with you.
>
> Kitty: I am a little concerned this new group is undertaking to do too much, and might get overwhelmed. Perhaps it would be better to decentralize, divide up the responsibilities a little.
>
> …
>
> *Jaggi*: Perhaps it's time we move to straw poll, to get a sense of the room. If we have consensus, we can move on to something else; otherwise we can have a full debate. Remember: this is just for spokes, people empowered by their col-

lectives or affinity groups, who have the little red or blue pieces of paper.

Man: One last question before we vote: this is a committee just to coordinate blockades?

Blue Bandana: Wait, isn't it a general tactical committee to coordinate the action?

Many: No! No!

Not only were the proponents of the committee leading a coordinated effort, they seemed to be intent on pushing it as far as it could go. That is, the proposal had started as a committee to convey information about blockades, and seemed to be morphing into something with much broader powers.

Lesley, who had been watching attentively, jabbed me when I reached for my paper. "Don't vote 'yes'! Every one of the people pushing for this proposal, they're all ISO. It's an ISO coup!"

Which would explain it. When it cames to a vote, we were the only ones who voted no, but there are about fifteen abstentions. This was unusual in itself.

It was not entirely clear to me what would happen next, since CLAC was not, technically, using a consensus process. If this were DAN, we would have blocked, and that would have been the end of it. Or, alternatively, if the facilitator was sufficiently skillful, it would have been clear earlier that some people felt strongly enough about the issue that they would block, and therefore, if the proposal was not simply withdrawn, it would be altered: various people would suggest "friendly amendments" until all the concerns had been addressed. CLAC however was using a system of modified voting: in theory, we were to proceed to debate, with one male speaker for, one male speaker against, etc, and finally, a vote requiring a 75% majority. But, in fact, what happened is precisely what would have happened if this were pure consensus.

Jaggi: So now, since we don't have complete consensus, we pass to debate. First let's see if those who voted against wish to clarify the reasons for their opposition; then we'll take three speakers for the proposal, and three against.

Lesley: I've been on tactical committees before…

Someone: Could you stand up please? It would be easier to hear.

Lesley: Yes, sorry. I'm Lesley from NYC DAN. I've been on tactical committees before and my experience has been that they don't tend to work out very well. In Seattle, remember, there was no central coordinating committee. Everything was done by consensus between affinity groups, even on the streets. At A16, though, we had some problems, some gaps in the blockade and, therefore, during the convention protests in Philadelphia and LA, the organizers decided to create tactical teams to provide overall coordination—really more

> in the way of an experiment than anything else. What we found was that, in Philly, the cops were able to pick off members of the team fairly easily and that caused more disruption than if we hadn't had any centralized coordinating at all. I wasn't in LA, but from what I heard, the tactical team quickly became a power structure unto itself, the LA DAN folk ended up being treated like gods and it completely stifled any kind of independent initiative.
>
> Finally, I have some concerns that creating such a team might end up centralizing power away from the local organizers. So, I oppose it, as I believe it's important to ensure we maintain a very clear commitment to keeping power in local hands.
>
> *Jaggi*: And the other no vote?
>
> David [*interrupted in the process of scribbling notes*]: Who me? Um, similar concerns.
>
> *Jaggi*: Well let's open up the floor then.
>
> Old Punk: I'd like to propose that as a friendly amendment, the committee be put together in such a way as to ensure that as many affinity groups as possible are represented.
>
> *Jaggi*: [*to Pink Cap*]: If that *is* a friendly amendment… Is it?
>
> Pink Cap: Yeah, okay.
>
> Man: I would also propose it be clarified that the committee not be a decisional body, but one that will gather information and suggest possibilities for action. I think that should be added as a friendly amendment too.
>
> Another man: When we were first talking about this proposal, we formulated it just as a strategic committee specifically to coordinate blockades. Since the straw poll, it seems we are talking about something that will coordinate the entirety of the action. So, there would seem to be a bit of confusion here—it is not clear to me which this is. Creating the first would be great. If it's the latter, there are groups created to do that already. I would be for it if it is former.
>
> [*Brief consultation between the facilitators*]
>
> *Jaggi*: The language we have says "strategic committee to coordinate with other groups," keeping in mind the friendly amendments…

Of which more quickly followed. By the time it was over, we had a strategic committee committed to a principle of decentralization, to coordinating with CLAC/CASA, and that would have no more than one representative from any specific affinity groups and as diverse a range of such groups represented as possible. When it did finally come to a vote, interestingly, there were a few no votes, but also a good deal of applause—a kind of mutual appreciation for having resolved the issue—and the threat of any sort of central committee emerging had been decisively defanged.

After the vote, Lesley and I went up towards the front, to confer with the CLAC people. Helene—that was the name of the woman with rainbow dreads—thanked us warmly for our opposition. "There is, of course, a strategic committee," she said, in somewhat uncertain English. "But we didn't want to seem like we were excluding them. Still, I did see the ISO people there…"

What happened was also, I might note, an excellent example of another key principle of consensus decision making: that one must never question the honesty or good intentions of another activist. In fact, to have even mentioned the ISO in the discussion would have been seen as almost shockingly confrontational.

We take some air; though I end up coming back pretty quickly because it's still freezing outside and I'd left all of my sweaters in the meeting. I find some coffee and come back just in time to catch the only major incident in which the careful surface of mutual respect and generosity actually begins to break down—predictably enough, around the issue of nonviolence. The issue had, apparently, been the almost exclusive topic of the first spokescouncil a month before. Now, someone is trying to return to it. I am not sure who the man was, but he was a big, bearded, Anglophone fellow in a lumberjack shirt, with a sheet of paper in his hands and a small squad of supporters behind him, His aggressive gestures seemed to mark him immediately as one of those classic activist stereotypes: the belligerent pacifist.

> Lumberjack: I would like to talk about diversity of tactics.
>
> [*audible groans from around the room*]
>
> *Older Facilitator*: I don't believe this is an appropriate time or place to discuss this issue.
>
> Lumberjack: Well, if I can't do it now, where else can I do this? I have a statement I would like to read. Some of us have prepared a statement…
>
> *Older Facilitator*: Excuse me, I'm trying to explain that…
>
> Lumberjack: …a statement to be adopted by the Red Bloc. We felt it would be appropriate because you did, after all, call for discussion on each bloc's attitude to the police. So, if you'll let me begin: [*begins reading*]
>
> "The goal of the Red Bloc is to express the people's democratic opposition to the FTAA and Summit of the Americas. To that end our actions will be to disrupt or prevent the Summit meeting. Our direct action will remove any barriers that will block our ability to express our opposition directly to the participants. We will likewise not honor any police actions or requests which will similarly attempt to block our access to these meetings. Our issues are opposition to FTAA and Summit; therefore, we won't take actions versus the working class people of this city. And while we will not allow the police or their barricades to block our access to the Summit, we will not use offensive weapons or attack the

police; if attacked, however, we will respond in a defensive fashion."

[*the speech is continually interrupted by catcalls and heckling*]

Jaggi: If you will allow me to translate the heckles here… There has been endless discussion of this already, and this is out of order. What you are saying runs against the principles of diversity of tactics, which we have already discussed (at great length) and finally consensed upon.

Lumberjack: Well, for those of us who are not in Québec City, but in… distant places, it's hard to translate what a vague phrase like "diversity of tactics" is actually supposed to mean. We feel that if we're asked to extend our responsibility for solidarity to everyone in the group, we have the right to ask the group to take responsibility for clarifying what limits, if any, they are imposing. We support the idea of diversity of tactics, but that doesn't mean support for any tactic whatsoever.

Older Facilitator: As one of the co-facilitators[3] I don't think we can enter a debate on diversity of tactics. The call to attend this spokescouncil was made on the principle of diversity of tactics. And, also, remember that our organization is decentralized, so there is no overarching authority that can place barriers or limits on what particular affinity groups can do. We are a consultatory body, we can't impose. So, I'd like to pass to a real proposal, if anyone has one.

That is unless there's a profound feeling in the room that we should discuss this. Is there?

No? Should we have a straw poll?

[*There are about 120 people left in the room*]

Jaggi: Allow me to explain to anyone unfamiliar with our process that if someone asks for a "straw poll," that is not a binding vote but a way to get a sense of the room, of people's feelings on a question, for the guidance of the facilitators. In this case, it would be to find out whether people want to discuss the proposal. Who's for debating this?

[*In favor: one pagan, a small cluster of Lumberjack's supporters*]

[*Against: overwhelmingly large number*]

[*Abstain: about twelve*]

Jaggi: All right, we have 75% in favor of moving on so that's what we'll do.

The next proposal concerned the starting point of the march: whether to assemble on the Plains of Abraham. There were concerns that it would be unwise to have thousands of activists chilling their heals in a large park in clear sight of the police for several hours before a major action. Others felt it was unwise to change plans so late in the day, because it was important for the Green Bloc at least to be able to know a definitive location in advance. Opinion seemed to be leading towards the former.

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[3] Actually the word she used was "co-animator," from the French *animateur* or *animatrice*.

Kitty took off, explaining she had promised a friend in the US she would check out the road to the airport. Her friend had heard there's only a single-lane highway, with no alternate routes. Dean, Sasha, and I head out for our own informal tour with the Scanner folk (Emma's disappeared somewhere). We assemble, as promised, at 1PM and munch sandwiches as we stroll through the cobbled streets of the soon-to-be forbidden zone.

1:15PM, Final Investigations

The Plains of Abraham, a huge stretch of parkland at the top of Jaggi's cliffs, is still entirely covered with snow. It's mostly deserted on a frigid Sunday afternoon. About a dozen of us set out in search of the stretch of wall supposedly already installed. We look incredibly obvious in our black hoodies, military pants and endless patches (the kid next to me, in blonde dreads, is wearing a jacket emblazoned with the words "Vegan Death Squad.") Only Buffy, the previous night's breakout facilitator, is incognito in brown suede jacket and a camera. She makes a not entirely unconvincing tourist (the camera is in fact to document information of possible tactical use). Sasha has a huge video camera, to document our expedition. Others have cameras too.

As we approach a bemused middle-aged skier for directions, I realize we've become the very embodiment of another classic activist stereotype. Actually, it's the perfect complement to the belligerent pacifist: the crowd of anarchists looking like a bunch of soldiers from some unholy army—what kind of army, you don't even want to imagine—who, when you actually talk to them, turn out to be the sweetest, most self-effacing people imaginable. Someone asks the skier, sheepishly, about the wall. He first thinks we're asking about the walls of the old city, but we explain ourselves. "Oh, the new kind of wall," he smiles, and points us past an ancient tower and down the hill.

The tower is a huge cannon tower overlooking the cliffs; after that things get very steep very quickly. A few of us try to climb down; one of the Prince Edward Islands kids gets a spontaneous nosebleed; only a few of us (me, Dean, two members of Montréal Ya Basta!) actually go down. The fence wasn't really visible even when we do, but Sasha gets some beautiful panoramic shots for a future documentary.

Later, we took extensive pictures of the area near the Grand Théâtre, where our imagined three-pronged attack was most likely to run into heavy resistance. "See that little park, right next to the theater?" asked Greg, one of the Montréal people. "That's where we had the huge battle last year over school reform."

Someone else explains that the government was holding a public hearing on how to carry out educational funding cuts. "They had promised that student groups would be allowed to participate, but then they only invited the right-wing ones." Those excluded announced their intention to disrupt the conference; the government announced their intention to surround the building with riot police. In the end, it came down to a stand-up battle: riot cops armed with tear gas and plastic bullets on one side and students armed with bricks, pool balls, and molotov cocktails on the other.

"Molotov cocktails?"

"They have totally different standards here. You have to bear in mind there was a kind of guerilla war going on here back in the 1970s. People got killed. Québec itself was under martial law for years. It's a very different place than the rest of Canada."

Fifteen minutes later, huddled in a bus shelter to parley on tactics, Greg, a little uncomfortable, brings up the matter again. "Actually, I've been meaning to bring this up. We've been discussing this a lot in Montréal and I think the consensus is, we're all thinking, that molotovs are definitely not a good idea." Milton, from the same affinity group, is nodding vigorously. "I'm not saying this as a moral thing," he notes to the Americans, "because I've never seen molotovs used against people who are actually vulnerable. You only use them against police in full flame retardant riot gear, who you know aren't going to get seriously hurt no matter what you do. So… it's not like you're actually trying to set anyone on fire. It's more… Okay, the way I see it, it's a way of showing *really* serious purpose, showing that you're determined to get through. A cop who sees a firebomb coming at him can't help but be startled, even if he knows it won't kill him; it can't help but make him wonder if he really wants to hold his position. It's a way of driving people back. And it works for that."

"It worked last year during the park battle, definitely," says one of the PEI kids. Then after a second: "not that I'm endorsing it either."

"The problem with molotovs…" Milton says. "Well, okay, first of all, if you throw anything, you have to do it *from the front of the line*. That's true of anything you throw and it seems obvious, but I can't believe how often some idiot forgets it. In the last year's battle, we had a shield wall, and some people would lob bricks and bottles over the line from waaaay back—so, of course, occasionally one would hit the back of a shield-bearer's head. If I hadn't been wearing a helmet, I would have got brained totally."

One of the PEI kids chimes in: "Even worse, if you're going to use molotovs, you have to practice first. It's amazing how many people don't realize that. At the very least, you have to practice packing it. If you don't, then half the time, when you cock your arm back to throw, the rag will pop out and the gasoline'll spill all over the guy behind you, so now his clothes are soaked with gasoline and there's people playing with open flames all around him."

"So no molotovs."

"Yeah."

"The one really legitimate use for molotovs," Buffy points out, "might be for property destruction. For example: say there's a water cannon. Now, that's a totally legitimate target."

"Remember, the water cannon didn't slow people down too much in that last demo."

"Water cannon can be pretty effective if they're used right."

"Still," says Greg. "The reason I wanted to have this little parley was to get consensus we *didn't* want molotovs—that tactically, it's just not a good idea. So: does anyone actually have an objection to that? Or do we have consensus?"

Nods all around. I assure him that no one on the US side has even considered using them.

We swung back to the spokescouncil just in time to see Emma and her new friend Craig come out in tremendous irritation. Apparently, a GOMM representative had, indeed, come in and asked for certain zones to be named Yellow-only; one was presumably the highway area, which we don't want anyway, so that's fine, but another was right up to the fence on one of the three streets we were going to march on. We shrug and figure, they'll work it out. Anyway, if we want to get home before 2AM, we'd better start driving.

The Road Home

For about an hour, Emma is still fulminating against pacifists. Why is it that people insist on trying to impose their own codes of conduct on others? How can they call themselves anarchists? These things should be left strictly up to each affinity group to decide for themselves.

"Are you saying," I ask, "that you're against written codes? Or any kind of code?"

"I'm saying any kind of code. What possible purpose do they serve?"

We go at it for some time. I remark on the possibility of Nazis showing up. Emma points out that Nazis do try to crash anarchist events fairly regularly. That's why many affinity groups allow only one exception to the general principle of nonviolence: when one has to deal with Nazis.

"All right, then, say you're at an action and you notice that another affinity group has shown up with a tactical thermonuclear device."

Emma rolled her eyes. "Which of course you could have easily prevented if only you had earlier published a code of conduct specifying 'no tactical thermonuclear devices?' Look, someone does something crazy, then all right, people around them have to do what they have to do."

Mercifully, Sasha changes the subject. We spend another fifteen minutes trying to get straight the different varieties of Canadian security to be ranged against us: from the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) to the Sûreté du Québec—names which gives the American activist the impression that we are about to be attacked by a combination of Dudley Do-Right and Inspector Clouseau. (Inevitable repartee: "Does your dog bite?" "Do you have a license for that minkey?") I remark that in Vermont, at least, with its socialist administration, we can expect the police to treat us with kid gloves. Emma is extremely skeptical about this. More likely they'll be especially harsh to prove themselves. Anyway, what influence do local politicians have over the police? By Montréal, we're talking families. Sasha grew up in Hollywood. I'm from a lefty working-class family in New York. Both Emma and Dean, however, turn out to be from Catholic working-class families from the Midwest, and this trumps everything. Emma's parents, for instance, adhere to some extreme charismatic sect. Dean thinks his mom is slightly schizophrenic (it runs in the family); she completely freaked when he was sixteen and she read his diary and discovered he was gay ("and it's not like there was anything explicitly sexual in there; I just admitted I had a crush on someone"). She covered the diary in pictures of saints and the Virgin Mary and to this day hasn't given it back to him, She used to send him underwear secretly blessed with holy oil to control his genitals. Visions and signs: Emma's mom thinks she's possessed by the devil and that's why she became an anarchist. She has monks praying to rescue her daughter. Sasha grew up around Hollywood, his mom Jewish, his dad Polish. Mom banned pop music from him for many years. Emma and Dean are unimpressed. They go on exchanging Catholic stories for what seems like approximately two and a half hours. Somewhere in upstate New York, I manage to go to sleep.

CHAPTER 3

FROM BURLINGTON TO AKWESASNE

The next couple weeks were increasingly frenetic. I'll give only the most schematic account.

NEW YORK DIARY CONTINUED

Thursday, March 29, 2001
Ya Basta! meeting, Brooklyn

Ya Basta! meeting, a big circle in Moose's living room. This meeting marks the first appearance of Smokey and Flamma's friend Jesse, a cocky-seeming young man newly arrived from Louisiana. Tells us he's an "organizer," needs something to organize, and Ya Basta! is clearly in need of help. He's actually a pretty good facilitator and insists we have a proper meeting, but just about everyone not of the Smokey and Flamma faction takes an instant dislike to him.

Friday, March 30
Independent Media Center, Manhattan

Hours at the IMC, mainly spent consoling Moose over a recent romantic disaster. Everyone is dashing about making preparations for the border action. Warcry is going as a dollar bill. Julie from the Urban Justice League is popping in and out, looking alternately sweet and officious. Twinkie and Brad[1] are out on bicycles when I come, searching for sushi. There's an enormous store of the stuff in the IMC fridge, mostly with the fish parts carefully picked out.

Sunday, April 1

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[1] Brad Will—the same Brad Will murdered in Oaxaca in November 2006. There seems little point now in disguising his identity.

Early word coming in about the border action. It sounds like it went fairly well—everyone was detained, and most told not to enter Canada for five years, but that was kind of expected, and at least we got coverage on WBAI and even some Canadian TV. Still, there seems to have been some kind of falling about between activists. The SalAMI action in Ottawa also went extremely well and grabbed headlines all over Canada. Of course, US media never even mentioned it but that was only to be expected.

DAN Meeting, Charas El Bohio

I was at the DAN meeting at Charas at 6 PM. Lesley and I gave our report-back from the Québec spokes, trying to explain the dynamics of the three color blocks. There were the usual worries about what was actually going on at Akwesasne and about Shawn's rhetoric, as well as a long discussion of PGA's upcoming general meeting in Cochabamba, and the need for Continental DAN to finally get on board and formally endorse the PGA principles (which we do).

Various people in phone contact with the crew at the Canadian border explain what the problem there was: it was Julie again. No one seems surprised. This time it's racial insensitivity. Twinkie had participated in the border action mainly to make a point about immigration issues: where white people can, normally, cross at will, things are entirely different for anyone who looks like they're from Asia, Latin America, or Africa; and, of course, if white people try to make a political issue of all this, then suddenly, they can't cross either. Julie, in her inimitable style, managed to not only completely fail to point this out to the WBAI reporter, but ignored Twinkie herself when she tried to get a place at the mike to explain it. Twinkie was very, very angry.

Tuesday, April 3

The "Pagan Call to Action" appears, one of perhaps a dozen minor calls for different groups or clusters taking part in the upcoming actions. It does indeed cite the Cochabamba Declaration, framed by Bolivian groups who successfully fought back an attempt by the government to privatize the local water into the hands of Bechtel:

> The Cochabamba Declaration:
>
> 1) Water belongs to the earth and all species and is sacred to life, therefore, the world's water must be conserved, reclaimed, and protected for all future generations and its natural patterns respected.
> 2) Water is a fundamental human right and a public trust to be guarded by all levels of government, therefore, it should not be commodified, privatized, or

> traded for commercial purposes. These rights must be enshrined at all levels of government. In particular, an international treaty must ensure these principles are noncontrovertable.
> 3) Water is best protected by local communities and citizens, who must be respected as equal partners with governments in the protection and regulation of water. Peoples of the earth are the only vehicle to promote earth democracy and save water.
>
> Here on the banks of the St. Lawrence/Magtogoek, with the river as our ally and the ancestors marching with us, we will become a living river, to bring this declaration as a challenge to the world's governments and an inspiration to her peoples.

Wednesday, April 4

The name-calling on the listservs is getting unusually vituperative as everyone seems to be pouncing on everyone else over the April 1 Border Action. The organizers themselves aren't saying much, but the moment anyone raises the issue of racism, someone else seems to slam them as a Marxist sectarian. Twinkie herself hasn't posted anything, but finally, one of her friends uploads Twinkie's own version of events:

> Can someone remind me why we are protesting the FTAA? Hmm???? To recruit more people in our organizations??? Or the fact that corporations ignore borders and people are oppressed by them! What about Cornwall and what's happening to the Mohawks? Are we going there because it's an easy way into Québec, or is it because we really support the fact that the border is a daily affront to their living and sovereignty?
>
> SO! That is what happened on Apr 1st at that media action thingy. No one addressed those issues and only focused on their lame, privileged, white asses not being able to get into Canada this ONE TIME because of this mass mobilization protest…

Meanwhile, she noted, as we were being politely and speedily processed there were poor-looking people of color waiting on line forever, some probably to end up in immigration detention. Did anyone even think to bring know-your-rights flyers or any kind of outreach? Did anyone even mention them at the press conference? Twinkie ends with a ringing declaration "NO MORE STREET THEATRE WITH PRIVILEGED ACTIVISTS AT SITES OF OPPRESSION!!!! Call me a separatist if you will, but I will not work with people with bad politics, and I will publicly call out people on their racism."

Thursday, April 5

The *Montréal Gazette* reports that prosecutors in Québec are saying that they've been asked to delay all bail hearings for protesters arrested at the upcoming summit for three to five days to keep them off the streets (Marsden 2001). Several, outraged, are announcing they intend to refuse to cooperate.

Ya Basta! Meeting at Aladdin's Place in Chelsea, 6 PM

Ya Basta!, meanwhile, is on the verge of break-up. April 5 was supposed to be the meeting at which we discussed common principles: what the collective is ultimately supposed to stand for. Jesse threatens to block any such discussion on the grounds that Ya Basta! is supposed to be "anti-ideological." Laura and I barely managed to restrain Moose from marching out. "Anti-ideological means we're not declaring ourselves anarchists or communists or adherents to any particular… you know, ideology. It doesn't mean we don't stand for anything at all. Or why are we going to Québec to begin with? Maybe we should form into two teams, one protesting the FTAA, one supporting it, and fight each other!"

As a compromise, I pull out a copy of the PGA principles of unity I'd been carrying around for just such an occasion. But that too is shot down, over objections to the phrase "nonviolent civil disobedience," which, as Target and Jesse and several others point out, could be interpreted as a condemnation of groups in the Global South like the Zapatistas, who have no recourse but to resort to armed struggle. When I try to point out that the Zapatistas actually created PGA, Smokey, who's facilitating, tables the discussion: "We've got a whole series of practical issues we still have to work out tonight and clearly this is going to be a long conversation. Let's see if we have time to get back to it next week." At this point, I go out and find Moose, who's been sitting outside in the hall next to the elevator, to tell him that, if he still wants to leave in a huff, he has my full support.

Sunday, April 8

DAN Meeting, Charas El Bohio, 6 PM

A small meeting, a little over twenty people, mainly concerned with what to do about what's beginning to be called the "Akwesasne hemorrhage." We've been getting nothing but bad news. It would seem the Band Council has definitively called Shawn's bluff. There are rumors that the Feds have been sending around tapes of street battles in Prague, claiming we're coming to do the same thing in their community. Rumors abound. Some of the Warrior Houses appear to be mobilizing against us. Shawn, on the other hand, keeps assuring us it's just a matter of working through the process, we have to expect opposition, there are always reactionaries. It's hard not to notice though that his public statements have completely changed in tone: he's now calling for us to attend a fish-fry, a festive, "child-friendly" event to discuss trade issues with the community, followed by an entirely peaceful crossing in which activists and community members will mix together and overwhelm customs with our sheer numbers. This creates a dilemma: on the one hand, rumors are necessarily going to be flying that the action will be a disaster. On the other hand, since everything depends on numbers, if enough people believe it will be a disaster, that alone will be enough to make it true.

Tuesday, April 10

Reports from Québec City are growing increasingly surreal. An anonymous Canadian celebrity is reported to have announced his or her willingness to provide funding for the construction of a giant medieval catapult with which to lay siege to the summit. Meanwhile, 1,700 prison guards, having received orders to clear hundreds of inmates from the Orsainville and Hull detention facilities to make way for protesters, decide to go on strike. Police are called in to take over the prisons, and the guards adopt tactics of nonviolent civil disobedience, blockading the prison entrances. The police attack, and a dozen guards are arrested.

> "They came in formation. They crushed us. They hit us with their clubs," said Michel Gauthier, a guard at Orsainville for twenty-three years.
>
> "The summit protesters who are scared to come here are right to be scared. We're the proof today that police here are very dangerous." (King and Van Praet 2001)

Thursday, April 12

Ya Basta! Meeting, Manhattan

The preceeding week had been full of internal reconciliation efforts within Ya Basta!: parties, messages, proposals to perhaps split into allied but autonomous affinity groups. In the end, when the time for another meeting comes, we have too much practical business to take care of to vituperate: the Burlington trainings, Canadian border scenarios, legal, communications, tactical questions. Moose is feeling increasingly guilty about the idea that he might be encouraging people into a situation where some might get seriously hurt. We end the meeting with a big go-around where we all talk about our parameters and limits concerning violence and nonviolence. Remarkably, just about everyone says exactly the same thing. None of us would be willing to attack someone else, or carry out an act we feel likely to cause physical injury to another person; none of us had the slightest moral problem with damage to corporate property; for pretty much all of us, the really difficult question was what we'd do if a companion or someone we cared about were being physically assaulted—that is, would we be willing to attack someone to save them? Most of us feel we wouldn't really be able to predict how we would react to such a situation until it actually happeed.

Perhaps, I thought, we weren't really so far apart as I'd imagined.

Another minor crisis demanding my offices as Minister of Information: the Band Council, or Council of Chiefs had issued a statement expressing alarm at the prospect of violence and destruction and begging activists not to sow discord or commit illegal acts in their community. I am asked to draft a response.

To the Mohawk Council, Akwesasne,

We are writing in response to your recent letter concerning our plans for a crossing through Akwesasne via Cornwall Island and into Canada on April 19th.

We would like to say, first of all, that we are deeply grateful to you for the understanding and spirit of tolerance that you show in your letter, and wish to do everything possible to put your minds at peace about the concerns you raise. Rest assured that we are coming to Akwesasne only as guests of residents who have invited us to do so; we have never planned to do anything, let alone anything violent or destructive, on our own accord. The last thing we would want would be to cause disruption to your lives or create difficulties for you.

Our understanding is that we have been invited to a peaceful, festive event which will involve fried fish, children, and an educational session, in which our hosts will explain to us some of the political issues important to the Mohawk Nation and First Nations people more generally. Afterwards, we will proceed peacefully across the bridge, keeping one lane open to ensure residents will not be inconvenienced and emergency vehicles can get through. At no time have we even contemplated ourselves engaging in confrontation with anyone; rather, we consider ourselves guests on someone else's land, and wish to act as such, with all possible respect to the Mohawk Nation and all its people. As political activists, we hope that this action will make it possible for us both to gain a greater understanding of the problems facing your Nation, your achievements, and your hopes for the future, and to better enable us to act in solidarity with you in the future, just as our hosts have already shown enormous kindness, understanding, and solidarity with us. We come as friends and we hope to establish a friendship that will endure long after we are gone.

Yours sincerely,
The members of the New York City Direct Action Network
The members of the New York City Ya Basta! Collective
The members of the Philadelphia Direct Action Group

Saturday, April 14

Québec police announce (*La Presse*, April 14, 2001) that "all possibilities would be examined before using tear gas" and that even then, doing so would be preceded by announcements in four languages. As for plastic bullets, the police said that these would be used only as a last resort before the use of lethal force, always against an individual, never against a crowd, and only when that particular individual "presented a serious threat to the police."

Marina, who is doing legal work for the Burlington mobilization, reports that her cell phone account was suddenly cancelled, along with two different email accounts. One company sends her a note explaining that her account was terminated because it was being used for "illegal activities."

All sorts of rumors are spinning around of impending disaster at Akwesasne. Several of us spend hours on email trying to squelch them—Target often suggesting the rumors are spread by police, me emphasizing that without turn-out, there's no way the action can work.

Burlington

Wednesday, April 17

Finished with the last week of classes, I'm finally free to throw myself into the action full time.

I arrived at the Burlington Convergence after it had been going on for a couple days, almost at the tail end really. Most of my time there had a strange, disjointed, choppy quality. In retrospect, I think some of this had to do with the fact that it seemed half the places I went—in cars, cafés, public places—someone seemed to be playing the Ramones ("I Want to be Sedated," "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue," "We Want the Airwaves"). It was only later someone explained to me that Joey Ramone had just died of liver cancer. Mainly, though, it was because everything seemed to be falling apart. Checking in at the housing desk, I ran into Raoul, one the Yabbas—a huge, teddybearish fellow in a tiny porkpie hat. "David, you have *no* idea how glad I am to see you here," he said, giving me an enormous hug.

"Why? What's going on? How have the Ya Basta! trainings been going?"

"We only had one. It was a disaster. Now it's not even clear Ya Basta! exists."

Apparently, tensions between the trainers had been the spark. The training, held on a UVM campus soccer field, had actually drawn a fair-sized crowd, perhaps fifty all told, and that was on the first day of the convergence when not many people had arrived. There was a kind of vast foam party as everyone played around with different sorts of possible body-armor, then the idea was to have everyone practice group formations in their newly created gear. That was where things began to fall apart. Betty, the dancer—and of course the only one of the trainers with an actual skill or teaching experience—was being systematically sidelined by the triumvirate of Moose, Target, and Jesse, who were all battling with each other for attention. It got to the point where even Betty, normally the most cheerfully philosophical person one might imagine, started to complain. So did a number of the other women participants. Moose exploded at the other two men for their gender insensitivity. "They ended up in a complete shouting match."

"They were actually shouting?"

"Well, maybe not quite literally shouting. But making no effort to disguise the fact that they were really pissed off."

The display of rage however itself made many of the women so uncomfortable they left, taking with them a good portion of the non-Ya Basta! participants.

Someone called in an activist from the West Coast named Laura, repeatedly described to me as "a kick-ass gender sensitivity trainer," who, after observing the group briefly, concluded that its dynamic was so deeply problematic that it probably wouldn't be worth the time and effort to try to salvage it.

"And…?"

"And that was it. That was our last training. None of the other scheduled trainings have even happened."

"Where's Moose?"

"Finally, he just threw his hands up and said he was giving up on us. He joined a different affinity group, some people from Philadelphia."

"Oh… I'm sure Betty really appreciated that. What about Smokey and Flamma? Emma? Where are they?"

"I haven't seen them since. I don't know. Someone said they might have left town."

I also discovered that, when it came to the sympathies of the local socialist administration, Emma had been spot on. Far from welcoming us, they had been doing all the fear-mongering one might expect from a local government bracing for a major action—despite the fact that we had repeatedly insisted to them there weren't going to be any actions in Burlington, just meetings. Local businesses had been warned of potential window-breakers, police patrols were everywhere; activists regularly found themselves being followed by unmarked black SUVs which seemed to serve no purpose other than to create a climate of fear and intimidation. That was the other thing I was hearing everywhere, aside from the Ramones music: scary stories. One car full of obvious Feds, had pulled up to Kitty and asked her if she wanted to jump in for a ride. Another SUV had chased Target through an alley. Someone had walked down the street in Ya Basta! gear and returned to his car ten minutes later to discover some enormous bruiser in a business suit examining the trunk. Several local activists had already reported mysterious break-ins.

After dropping off my bags at the Burlington IMC, and coordinating with the people who were going to be sharing my accommodations, I set off for the spokescouncil.

The Burlington Spokes

At the housing office, I'd picked up a flyer which explained that the spokescouncil was going to be at a place called "Billings Student Center," on the University Terrace of UVM, not far from the center of town. The building turns out to be a huge turreted structure in red stone, looking somewhere between church and castle. Apparently, it used to be the campus library. There are already a couple of black flags and banners on the lawn outside. At the door, we're asked to affirm that we are not police or working journalists, then peruse the usual tables full of documents, along with large black markers with which to write the legal and medical phone numbers (posted everywhere) on one's leg or arm. The meeting itself is located in a large, circular room with a circular balcony surrounding it; too small to use for an actual theater, it must be some kind of campus meeting-space. Up on the balcony, apparently, are various offices of student clubs, including the student radio station, where there's a small crowd of technical types—mostly IMC people—making use of the equipment. In the center of the big room is a big round wooden table; empowered spokes are sitting directly around it; everyone else is milling around behind them, sitting in clumps on the floor, or drifting in and out of other rooms. There's no expectation that the audience should stay quiet during meetings—actually, spokes are expected to be continually conferring with their affinity groups, and members of affinity groups with each other. Though, in a room this small, the facilitators usually end up having to intervene periodically to remind everyone to keep it down to a reasonable volume.

The meeting has of course already started (have I ever actually witnessed the beginning of a spokescouncil?) though only about two-thirds of the spokes are already there. The facilitators, male and female, have arranged the usual pieces of butcher paper against a nearby wall and are writing out an agenda with colored pens. This is a real spokes so everyone is participating in constructing the agenda.

Looking for someone from New York who can fill me in on the situation, I spot Twinkie, munching on a muffin in the corner.

"So how have things been going?"

She pauses, draws in a deep breath, searches for appropriate words. "Could be a lot better. Yesterday a delegation of Mohawks came from Akwesasne, asking us not to come."

"These were Band Council people?"

"There were seven or eight of them; a deputy chief, some people who put on a little ritual..."

"Really? I mean, like, a Thanksgiving ritual? Where they thank the Creator for having made the skies and waters and strawberries and everything?" (I too had been reading up around that time.) "You know that's the standard Mohawk way of starting any important event. I've always wanted to see one of those."

"Yeah, yeah, that's exactly what it was like. They started with a Thanksgiving ritual. It was very beautiful. Then they told us not to come."

"So there were people from the Council *and* Traditionalists? So is it," confused now, "…the Traditionalists against the Warriors now?"

"No, there were people who said they were from the Warrior Society with them too. Progressives, Traditionalists, Warriors… It was kind of a disaster."

I sat down nearby and started scribbling out initial notes: there seemed to be about 150–200 people, with fairly reasonable gender balance, something of an ethnic mix, though, I noted, absolutely not one single African-American in the room. No, actually, one. A West Indian looking fellow on the balcony. But that was it.

Laura, the gender sensitivity trainer, is also acting as co-facilitator with some fellow from Boston named Mark. As I started jotting meeting notes, she was in fact telling everyone that they'd been having big problems in this regard. However grudgingly, I was forced to admit she was pretty good at this.

> *Laura*: I just wanted to say before we start that I've been really impressed by the respectfulness people have been showing in terms of the racial dynamics here. And this despite the fact we're in a really difficult situation. In terms of the gender dynamics, we've been having some problems. So before we do anything else, let me just say: guys, please, check yourselves before you speak. If you've already spoken two or three times on the same issue and others haven't said anything: step back. Give other voices a chance to be heard. If your point is really as crucial as you thought it is, then probably someone else will make it anyway. And if they don't, you can always put yourself back on the stack. Remember: this shit is deeply internalized in all of us, so guys, *please*: be conscious.

We start as usual with a go-round, each spoke identifying themselves and the affinity group they represent.

> *Laura*: Any more housekeeping items? No? Okay, several of the people who facilitated last night were also involved in prior negotiations with the Mohawks. We've given them a fifteen-minute slot to fill us in on some of the history, in way of background. Mac?
>
> [*People start searching for Mac. Someone on the balcony says he's on the phone. There's a brief huddle at the head of the table*]

All right, so Lesley from NYC-DAN will take his place. No, wait, here's Mac.

[Other people introduce themselves as part of the team: Twinkie, of AUTODAWG, Jessica from the Philadelphia Direct Action Group, Nisha, an activist from New York, who explains she's not speaking for anyone but herself]

Mac: And I'm Mac. I'm with DAN and the People's Law Collective. Hi, how's everyone doing?

I've been the main person speaking with the Boots Clan and Warriors from Akwesasne and Tyendinaga Reserves. The main organizer I've been dealing with is Shawn Brant from Tyendinaga. I spent three years on the streets with Shawn in Ontario; he's one of the most solid, dependable activists I know.

Back in January, we were working with groups in Canada to help move folks across to the other side—the idea was to shut down any border post that refuses to let us in. Shawn said he'd speak with the Mohawk community in Akwesasne, and eventually some of us went up to meet him. At the time, he framed it as a very strong action, opening with a statement about the bridge as a daily affront to their sovereignty, and claiming that they would do whatever it took to seize it.

As a result some people on our side put out some premature statements.

Meanwhile, Shawn went to the Boots, who are big in the Bear Clan at Akwesasne. Out of respect, he also approached the Band Council, which is the formal, elected body, but they became alarmed at the prospect of a possibly divisive action taking place on their lands.

So, when we went to a second meeting at Akwesasne, they made it clear, first of all, that the action won't involve actually closing the border as the Band Council was concerned about that. We told them, sure. Later there were more concerns: at the third meeting, Harriet Boots came out strongly in support of the action, along with her husband John and their son Stacey. She wanted to ensure that we emphasized the terrible health conditions on the reserve—the fact that the local clinic tells women there not to breastfeed their children because the water there is so toxic—and the bridge as an affront to Mohawk sovereignty. She also said that, as their goal is to unify the nation, they wanted us to be peaceful and organized. That we shouldn't talk too much on the reserve itself, but they were going to organize a fish-fry, then we would go to meet our Canadian allies halfway across the bridge. The idea was that, first, vehicles would pass lawfully, then, simply by weight of numbers, we could peacefully overwhelm the border authorities and everyone would be able to get through. After that, the Band Council said okay, but they registered some strong reservations.

Shawn told me a joint statement of support came out yesterday. The Wolf Clan is closer to the Band Council (there had been a kind of civil war between the Wolves and the Bears, who tend to work with the Warriors, over plans to build a casino some years ago) so they've definitely been suspicious.

Last night, though, they issued a letter of support—so it's too bad some of the Band Council people and Brian Skidder came to our spokescouncil and urged us not to come. They told us that police showed them videos they claimed were from Seattle, but I think must have actually been from Prague, of people throwing molotovs and battling police, and told them this was the sort of thing they'd be bringing on their people. After the meeting, the delegates said that, after having actually met us and seeing how we treated one another, they recognized we were good people and they didn't fear us any longer. But Brian Skidder still told us not to come.

I spoke with Stacey and Shawn this morning, and I'm trying to get hold of a press release they put out. They are still very much asking us to come—they want our support, they want to see a peaceful, safe action. They're still having the fish-fry, they've invited us to it, and they also want to help us with crossing into Canada. I recognize this is not a simple action, but I believe in our action and believe it's high time the anti-globalization movement does something like this, and establish ties to First Nation activists on both sides of the border.

Mark: Are there any clarifying questions?

Laura: …that is, for the team who have been working with the Mohawk organizers?

Jessica: I should also point out that I was at the second and third meetings at Akwesasne, and that this "statement of support" was really more a statement of non-opposition.

Woman: What's happening on the Canadian side now?

Mac: Our allies in Kingston say they will be there on the other side of the bridge, they will be flexible and willing to help in whatever way they can. Oh—I should add there's a rumor (and there are going to be lots of rumors; we're going to have a hard time sorting all this out) that the police have already set up buses and two trucks along the highway on the other side of the bridge. That may or may not be true, but we have to assume the police *will* be there too.

Man: Our affinity group wants to know if the Wolf Clan was ever approached directly?

Mac: No, we felt we should let our allies deal with them. Which might have been a mistake.

Woman: I'm from the legal team and we're prepared to shift to another crossing location if we have to. Also, a clarifying question: why is it that Shawn, who's not actually from Akwesasne, is speaking for that community?

Mac: Shawn is not speaking for the community. He's been an organizer for ten or fifteen years; he's from a leading family at Tyendenaga; he went through the protocols to get the support of the Boots family, but nothing more.

Woman: My affinity group is concerned: will they still have to go through customs?

Mac: There's a chance we will. We hope to overwhelm them, but we might not. The best we can say is there's as good or better a chance of doing so here than anywhere else.

Man: If Shawn isn't from Akwesasne, who is it from Akwesasne who actually does want us to be there?

Mac: I won't guarantee numbers, but one of the most powerful clans does want us there. The Band Council goes back and forth, and the Wolf Clan is definitely against us. Our allies say we have ninety percent support in the community as a whole, but we don't know what's really happening there. I don't want to tell you something that turns out to be wrong.

Laura: Okay, let me open the floor now to anyone who wishes to ask questions.

Famous: Hi, I'm Famous. I'm with the medics. I'd like to know whether we'll have an escort as we approach the Reservation?

Mac: No, our allies are going to be concentrating on security on the reserve itself. There won't be any actual opposition once we get there, but there may be before—there's been some talk of police roadblocks. But that'll be up to us to deal with.

Famous: No, I mean at the edge of the Reservation.

Mac: Yes, there will be.

Mark: Remember this is clarification on background history, not logistical scenarios.

Tony: Hi, I'm Tony, also with the medics. What impressed me about the delegation that came here last night were their concerns about opening wounds from the civil war. Would anyone be able to address that?

Mac: Well, our allies say this will be a unifying action, that they're more unified now than ever. I can't tell you who's right.

Laura: Other questions specifically from spokes—not logistical now, that'll be later. Right now, history questions that need to be clarified.

This is looking bad. Mac is a dedicated anarchist and normally one of the most open, friendly, people one could possibly imagine. His usual manner is so innocent and playful some find it hard to take him completely seriously. Now, trapped between his friend Shawn and the American activists, as he answers one question after another with carefully worded statements, he's beginning to sound like a politician. Presumably, in his position, it's almost impossible not to. After all, I reflect, isn't this just what makes politicians talk like weasels to begin with: being caught between constituencies who want radically different things, trying to make everybody happy? But the audience is noticing, and many are not happy.

> Woman: I suggest we talk directly to Shawn about this.
>
> Mac: I'm still talking to him. To be honest, he's getting very frustrated with our movement. He feels he's had to hold our hand through this whole thing.
>
> *Laura*: Any more questions specifically about the history of negotiations? No? Okay. As facilitators we're unclear on what's happening next. We were told we might be getting a phone call from Akwesasne, we might be getting a letter faxed in. So [*to the team*] do you have input? Help me here.
>
> Nisha: Jodie, could you step up? This is your section on the agenda now.
>
> [*A woman named Jodie steps up.*]
>
> Jodie: Hi. I'm from Philly, I do a lot of work with Western Shoshone and other Native American groups out West. I was going to be holding a cultural respect training before the action, but it looks like we're not going to have time for that. I've got a handout I was going to use for that (people can share it with their neighbors if there's not enough copies) but, the main thing is: we've also got Russell Black here, of the Oglala Lakota. And I felt maybe first we should hear from him.
>
> So, Russell, could you stand up and share a bit of your understanding of this situation?

A tall skinny kid appears, who looks like he might be about seventeen years old. He stands at the other side of the table. "I am here on behalf of my elders," he begins. He then pronounces a brief prayer, and a slightly longer speech, emphasizing how his nation, the Oglala (still erroneously referred to as the Sioux) are divided by similar factionalism between the traditionalists and a so-called "pragmatic" group tied to the official reservation government, who are corrupt and really just agents of the federal government. Only the traditionalists have made a principled stand against genocide and violations of the earth… Everyone listens in rapt, respectful silence. Myself, I can't help but reflecting this would feel a trifle more convincing if there hadn't been traditionalists with the party yesterday telling us not to come. At the end, people in the hall react half with applause, half with energetic twinkling.

"No matter what we decide tonight," another woman says, "we want to do it in a respectful fashion. We've been invited to a meal. Surely it must be disrespectful not to show up for it."

Madhava, one of the IMC folk upstairs, announces we've got a call coming in from Akwesasne.

Then we seem to have lost it again.

"A very interesting piece of information," remarks Laura as Mac and the technical people all scramble upstairs. "Our fax lines have been mysteriously jammed all day. We've been unable to send or receive anything. Plus the phone lines are uncertain. We're trying to put the call through DSL..."

Techie Upstairs: I think we've got it on the PA system...

Mac: Ready Shawn? [*crackle*] Are you still there? [*crackle*]

Techie: Shit, this isn't going to work. We're going to have to use another phone.

[*Much futzing about with equipment*]

Laura: So give me some good news here, guys. Can we proceed?

Mac: [*on a phone line with Shawn*] How would people feel if I were to come down and repeated Shawn's words

[*Twinkles*]

[*Mac explaining the situation to Shawn*]

Laura: No, don't come down. Just do it from the balcony.

Mac: Okay. [*from the balcony, begins repeating what Shawn is saying*]:

First, I want to apologize for having to do things in this way. It would have been much more appropriate for us to be there with you, but just not possible right now. I just also want to say there's a lot of bullshit going on here...

Someone: Um, can you repeat that, sorry?

[*Much laughter*]

Shawn [*via Mac*]: As activists, we share a common responsibility. "Free trade" is about the people being manipulated by the government. What happened at your meeting last night was us being manipulated by the native government. These people do not represent the best interests of the people of Akwesasne, and the people have reaffirmed yesterday their welcoming of Americans coming to protest the FTAA. We do not have Indian titles behind our names, but we carry the honor and integrity of, and are the true leaders of, the Mohawk Nation. That honor and integrity is reflected in the commitment we've made, and the fact that we have done those things we said we would do. These attempts being made to reduce our numbers by asking activists not to come are based on fear: the government knows they are not in control, that they are part of a system that has allowed our community to be poisoned, our children to be born with birth defects, our integrity and our culture to be lost. And now they claim to be working in our best interest to prevent people from coming.

We affirmed yesterday that we will extend the honor that's required to people going to Québec City to legitimately dissuade governments from further free trade negotiations. We acknowledge that those who go to fight the

> governments that we fight shall be recognized for their commitment, because we share the same enemy. If people are dissuaded from coming, then that is by their choice, we have made a pledge and a commitment and we stand by that. You are all welcome in Akwesasne, and to the same degree that we have said in previous discussions.
>
> All I can say is that I hope people will come, but I can certainly understand the confusion that's been put in people's minds by the people last night. But the people are with you.
>
> [*Wild applause*]

After some vain attempts to keep the line open so people can ask Shawn questions, the connection collapses in hissing static and, from then on, no phones in the building could be made to work. Eventually we turn our attentions back to meeting logistics (with the time crunch, Jodie's cultural sensitivity training, scheduled for 7PM, will have to be moved over another building at 8 or 9PM. Then there's the problem of dinner…).

> *Laura*: So. Have affinity groups actually brought proposals about how we should proceed from here?
>
> [*Indications from several that they have*]
>
> Not everyone has to, but if any do, we can try to sort out how the various proposals overlap and relate and hone them down to a workable list of alternatives.
>
> Woman in Yellow: Here's our proposal. We propose we should go to Akwesasne, but keep things open in our minds whether we'll cross there or in another place. We should stay in contact with the Mohawks on the Canadian side, so they can tell us what's happening there. We go to the fish-fry and reassess, hold a spokescouncil there.
>
> *Laura*: Well, that's one proposal. Awesome. Others? Oh, and bear in mind we can also develop alternative scenarios tonight—you can propose something new. So: any others? No?
>
> Woman in Blue: Our collective made an alternative proposal after last night, when things seemed shaky. First, for the sake of solidarity with Mohawks, we should attend the fish-fry, if we're still invited (we obviously are), so as to forge a working relation with activists up there and pick up others who will be coming to Akwesasne to cross. Then we should actually attempt to cross into Canada at a different spot.
>
> The other possibility proposed last night was to join together with Canadians and any Mohawks who want to cross, and attempt to do so together at a different point.
>
> Eric from NYC DAN: When was that other location to be decided?

Another Woman from that collective: I don't think it would be strategically wise to say here. But there are definitely people working on it.

Laura: Also we have this. [*Someone starts passing a printed version of the first proposal around the room; the spokes all seem to already have one*]

Woman: Was there a proposal to talk to the Band Council?

Laura: Actually, I think that's all we have now. You can offer friendly amendments—but, right now, let's first move to concerns…

Enos: Hi, I'm Enos and I'm spoking for the Ya Basta! Collective, along with NYC DAN. I've heard two concerns from New York folk: First, that the original proposal to just go and cross, from before the delegation came yesterday, is still on the table, and no one's discussing it; second, that it might be too difficult to make a decision once we get there.

Enos, is a radical cartoonist from New York, fortyish, with a long blonde ponytail and only the faintest trace of a Brooklyn accent. How he ended up our spoke is unclear to me; it's not clear to what degree the Ya Basta! Collective even exists, at this point, though by now I notice there's now maybe a dozen Yabbas in the room. It seems we're reconstituting ourselves, at least as an affinity group. At first, though, I'm too busy taking notes to participate much.

Laura: Well, in that case, can someone restate the original plan?

Woman: [*reading off the handout*] That the caravan proceeds to the fish-fry; we meet there at around 12 noon; listen to two or three speakers and any other events our hosts have arranged; then, at 4PM, after we eat, we return to our vehicles, go to bridge (keeping one lane of the highway open as the Band Council has requested so emergency vehicles and so forth can pass through), meet Canadians at the center, mix together with them, proceed to the other side, and together approach customs.

Laura: Are there any other proposals that needs to be on the plate?

[*Apparently not*]

Mark: Okay, so the first proposal we've heard tonight is go to the fish-fry, keep contact with our allies in Akwesasne, reassess our support, reconvene the spokes, and decide there how to proceed. At any rate, that's how it stands now—tonight we can certainly add further elaborations to it.

[*Spokescouncil members raise hands*]

Woman: I have a point of process: are we now trying to come to consensus on this proposal?

Mark: No, we're not trying to come to consensus, but just to get a feeling for, I guess, which one to start with…

[*Three hands shoot up around the table*]

Woman: Maybe it would be better to start with a straw poll to see where we're at, which proposal most of us are leaning to, then do a breakout so that spokes can consult with their affinity groups about how to proceed from there?

Mark: No, I think we really need to flesh this out. There will be sort of a breakout later, when we eat. Then we can all confer in more detail with our affinity groups.

Tony: If we did hold a straw poll, would that be of everyone in the room, or just of spokes?

Mark: I was assuming just the spokes. Unless someone wants to propose we open it up?

[*No such suggestion emerges. Until…*]

Enos: I'm concerned that this room really represents the bulk of the group that's actually going to go. In which case we probably should just sound out everyone now that we have them in one place; because the more time goes by, the more people are likely to start drifting away. So the sooner we can confer with our groups, the better.

[*Much twinkling*]

Laura: Okay, I'm seeing a lot of support for that suggestion. We'll do it that way.

Woman: Could you read through each proposal first?

Mark: Good, we'll get a sense of the room, then have a quick breakout.

Laura: How long a breakout are people suggesting? I'm seeing two minutes… five minutes… ten… No, please, not the room, just the spokes… Okay, then, the feeling seems to be for ten.

Mark: Proposal #1 then is to go to the fish-fry and then decide; #2 is to go to the fish-fry, don't cross, but invite other Mohawks to go with us to another crossing; #3 is the original plan where we all meet at the center of the bridge and try to overwhelm customs.

Laura: I see three hands of spokes who wish to say something. [*Makes a stack*]

Man with Blonde Dreads: I want to put out a proposal that we not go to the fish-fry at all and find an altogether different spot to cross.

Laura: Is there any reason this didn't come up earlier?

Dreads: The matter was just brought to my attention.

Woman in Yellow: My understanding is that this is supposed to be a gathering just outside the reservation for us to meet with our allies, but also rally for community—Shawn was saying that it was going to be "child friendly," a kind of party with balloons and games—an opportunity for them to hear us talk about free trade and then for us to mostly listen. Also, they're making us vegan food—traditional corn chowder—in addition to the fish. Which is amazing in itself. I've never heard of such a thing.

Laura: I can see there's a lot of energy here, but… someone has a process point over there. Yes?

Man: Yes, it's about that last proposal. If I'm not mistaken, we called this particular spokescouncil to discuss plans for Cornwall. Now, of course, none of us are under any obligation to go to Cornwall if we don't want to go, but if someone wants to talk about not going to Cornwall at all, shouldn't he withdraw that from this spokes and simply call for a different spokes for people who don't want to go?

Laura: Hmmm. [*to Dreads*] Do you in fact want to withdraw the proposal? Or not?

Dreads: Yes, I'd like to strike it then.

Mark: OK, any more clarification needed on first proposal?

Woman: If we did hold a spokescouncil in Akwesasne, would the spokes there include Mohawks?

[*Much discussion. It's not clear anyone knows.*]

Enos: Ya Basta! have just passed information to me that there will be some members of the Band Council at the fish-fry.

Neala: The first proposal says, if we go, we should be "open in our minds" about what to do next. But, like Enos, I would really prefer the decision to be made earlier. We have no idea what things will be like there, whether we'll even be able to hold a spokes.

Mark: Okay, but technically we're still back on clarifying questions about the first proposal, not concerns.

Laura: Also, the crowd should not be speaking directly to spokes. The facilitator should. I know it sounds constrictive, but if we don't do it that way, the spokes can end up feeling ganged up on.

Woman in Yellow: I want to clarify my proposal (that's proposal #1 now). What we're saying is the fact that Mohawks are willing to make us vegan food is an amazing, unprecedented show of hospitality. We *must* come.

Mark: So far, I'm not hearing any clarifying questions but only concerns and supporting arguments. Can I take that to mean we're moving on to concerns?

Laura: I'm informed the answer to "will Mohawks be involved in the spokescouncil" is "if they want to."

[*She begins writing on one of the sheets of butcher paper on the wall, starting a column labeled "concerns."*]

Woman: Oops. I still have one clarifying question. Would it be impolite to go to the fish-fry and not to cross? Or has this already been asked, and Mac said it wouldn't be?

Man: Also the idea of reconvening the spokes there, does that…

Mark: I will interpret this question as a concern, now.

Man: …would it go against respect?

Woman: Also, Justin just told me that there will be people coming from all over the Northeast who will be coming straight to Akwesasne, without passing through Burlington. Maybe several hundred.

Mark: That's an appropriate use of point of information, but I'm still looking for any clarifying questions or concerns, here.

Enos: Concerning the first proposal: what will be the criteria for calling off the action?

Woman in Yellow: If people from the community don't come, don't speak to us… If we get a feeling we're not wanted, then we leave as soon as we can.

Man: If we do cross, will that mean going through customs?

Another man: Is it that we don't want to do anything on our own—it's all up to them? We don't want to do an independent disruption?

Fred: And, if we're turned away, will we then go to an alternate site?

Woman in Yellow: The question was, what kind of border crossing will happen with each proposal? In the case of mine, #1, I think the answer can only be: whatever sort the Mohawks propose. Lucy, you've been in negotiations with people in Akwesasne. What do you think?

Lucy: I've heard no guidelines yet. Other than nonviolence.

Man: Mac told me it would be considered disrespectful if we just go to the fish-fry and then leave immediately.

Woman: If we go to the border, is it all or nothing? What if some of us get through and not others? Do we split up, or do we all turn back in solidarity?

Woman in Yellow: That's a logistical decision; I think we're doing logistical proposals after we finish this part.

Mark: So are there any other clarifying questions or concerns about proposal #1? No? Okay. How about #2?

[*They restate the proposal*]

Enos: How would this be consistent with following the lead of Mohawk security?

Mark: Okay, that's a concern.

[*Laura writes it down*]

Nancy: Hi, I'm Nancy from Pittsburgh. What does it mean to "invite" the Mohawks to cross with us elsewhere? Are we going to sit and strategize with them, or just bring the proposal to them already made? Because, if the former, there's not much difference between the two proposals.

Woman in Blue [*who brought the proposal*]: To me that's kind of a question of semantics. I don't know, but we'll tell them they're welcome to come with us.

> Nancy: But the idea is we come with a preset plan?
>
> Woman in Blue: I don't see any other way to do it.
>
> *Laura*: Okay, so we come with a predetermined plan.
>
> Woman in Blue: Due to the situation, many of the people here have no other chance—so I would definitely say "all or nothing." The first person who's turned back, the rest of us go too, in solidarity.
>
> [*Many twinkles*]

This was key: the emerging plan was to overwhelm the border post with sheer numbers, and that would only work if we insisted everyone go through together. So there was some sort of emerging consensus. This having been established, though, we all broke up to consult with our spokes over dinner.

The remains of NYC Ya Basta! was assembled in one corner of the room, with plastic plates full of some kind of vegan couscous and paper cups full of apple cider. It was 7PM. This was, I discovered, the first time that our collective had actually met, in any capacity, since the last abortive training. Moose was gone, but otherwise it was mainly the DAN people—the hardcore faction, never large, had by now completely disappeared. We went over the three proposals quickly and decided that, if we did go, which we probably would, it would be best to stick with the original plan and try to cross at Akwesasne. Proposal #1 felt too weak. Proposal #2 we could keep as a backup if things went wrong. There was also a strong feeling we should support the "all or nothing" principle. We empowered Enos to block any proposal that did not include it. Enos returned to the table and I got some more food, and tried to track down the people I'm going to be staying with to make sure of my housing situation.

A few minutes later, I ran into Kitty from Connecticut, who asked about the Ya Basta! crack-up. It was all very irritating to her, she remarked, as a representative of what's probably the second largest Ya Basta! collective on the East Coast. "I mean, I recognize that the gender dynamics were fucked up. But just throwing up your hands and running off like that. Where does that leave us? Anyway, I have an idea. We still have all the gear lying around. Why don't we try to have a meeting of everyone who was intending to be part of a Ya Basta! contingent and see what sort of resources we still have, what sort of numbers? Try to see if we can't still pull something together?"

I said it sounded like an excellent idea to me.

Finally, anyway, I had a project. There was an empty conference room right next to the antechamber, with tables already arranged in a square. We located paper and a magic marker, put up a notice that there would be a Ya Basta! meeting at 10:15, then go off to start alerting possible interested parties.

By the time I got back to the main room and my note-taking, at 7:35PM, things were getting uglier. Apparently the straw poll had split fairly evenly between the three proposals, providing little guidance on how to proceed. Laura was writing concerns, one at a time, on the wall behind her, trying to see what the sticking points are, whether a proposal could be patched together that incorporated all of them. It was beginning to look more and more though like we would end up backing #3—the new argument being that, if we were to show up and not attempt to cross, we would be insulting the Warriors who had arranged the crossing.

> Enos: Look, we're never going to be able to do anything that won't offend someone. And, yes, sometimes that person who we're going to offend *will* be a member of an oppressed group. Maybe we should just get over it.
>
> *Laura*: Could you speak more clearly, so I can write?
>
> *Mark*: Also, we've been hearing a lot of the same points made over and over, so let me ask you: If you're on the stack, but someone else voices your concern before you do, please don't repeat it. Just pass and let the next person speak.
>
> Woman in Yellow: Well, in response to the question, proposal #2 was proposed in response to concerns of people last night. Maybe Russell can enlarge on why I feel it crucial to attend the fish-fry. Russell?
>
> Russell: I fear there's a lot of confusion about First Nations. In my Nation, if a warrior society was to invite you formally, and offered food and a prized dish, if you were to reject it, that would be the utmost disrespect. I would strongly urge you to support the Warrior Society, as they'll be on the forefront of struggle, and I'll go representing my society as well. In my society, there are also "progressives" claiming to speak for all, but the traditionalists should always be the strongest voice.
>
> Man: I feel it's very important when we get there to see what kind of support we really have in the community before we commit ourselves.
>
> Another man: My affinity group absolutely won't get through customs. I am still waiting to find out whether we're being asked to or not.
>
> *Mark*: Point of information: are there are other spokescouncils, other actions, for those who don't want to go to Cornwall? Is anyone organizing alternatives? No?
>
> All right, are there other concerns?
>
> Woman: What will happen to any other people who come to the fish-fry *if* we go off?
>
> Neala: In response to Enos's point earlier: if we have to offend anyone, it shouldn't be our allies.
>
> [*Scattered applause*]
>
> Man: As far as I'm concerned, this whole process is racist. We should have

been talking to all parties from the start. It's unfortunate how we've allowed ourselves to be misled by people downplaying the conflict in the community, and I know it's unfair to say any *one* person is racist, but a lot of the points I've been hearing here are just bullshit. I'm not saying we should go home, or not go, but I really feel obliged to point this out.

Laura: Okay, can I ask that we not identify anyone else's point as "bullshit" or do similar emotional spin-work? Look, we're all frayed. But we have to remember why we're here: We're here because we're all trying to figure out the best thing to do in a difficult situation. Also, I'm a little worried people are behaving more irritably because they're hungry. So, people, if your spoke has not been fed yet, check with them, there's still plenty of food.

Enos: Look, I'm sorry if I've said anything that offended anyone. I understand that we're all here for the right reasons. I never meant to imply otherwise.

Mark: We must give each other the benefit of the doubt for honesty and good intentions. Consensus is not the same as majority rule; it's not a competition. We are all working together to figure out the right thing to do.

So, that being said: are there other concerns about proposal #2?

Ariel: Should I read the statement in which we explain to our Mohawk allies why we would be crossing elsewhere, and inviting them to come along?

Mark: Well that sounds relevant, but I think it would be more appropriate to read it later on.

Woman in Yellow: I'm concerned that making such an invitation to the Mohawks would be interpreted as contradicting the original idea of our supporting them. Now we're inviting them to dismiss their own action?

Laura: [*still looking at the list of "concerns" on the wall*] Will this fit into the category of going to their land and ignoring their initiative? Because that concern has already been raised.

Woman in Yellow: For me, it would be the ultimate negation of why I came here, which was to support *them.*

Enos: If people have worked out alternative locations, I'd hope we'll hear about them. I keep pointing out that both #1 and #2 presuppose an alternative route but does one even exist? We *can't* just improvise this later. We need a plan!

Woman: Remember, the reason it first seemed #2 was most desirable was because we don't have a clear sense of what the community there wants. I came here to support Mohawks, but clearly there's a diversity of desires. And some of the concerns I've heard ring deeply. I'm swayable…

This could be going on forever. Some insist they are here to support the Mohawk Nation as a whole, and wonder how to do it. Others are here to support our allies, even though it's not clear who or how many they actually are. Organizers are using cell phones to try to contact Shawn and the Boots family, occasionally getting through long enough to make additional clarifications.

Sizing up the room again, I'm beginning to understand what the problem is. This isn't just an ordinary crowd of activists. Or even anarchists. It has a distinctive Black Bloc feel. Warcry and Target's call on the IMC had been far more effective than any of us had anticipated: just about every anarchist who knew for sure they would not be able to get through the border legally, some from as far as LA, were now stuck here in Burlington. On the one hand, there was a strong contingent—Twinkie, for instance, was one of them—who felt that once we had committed to work with Mohawk activists on Mohawk issues, our responsibility was to do right by them, and if that meant we didn't get to go to Québec City, then so be it. For them, to think of the Mohawks instead as a means to an end, as a way to get through to Canada, was yet another example of arrogant, racist exploitation. Others felt equally strongly that they hadn't come all the way from Iowa or South Carolina just to have lunch on a reservation, where most people didn't seem to want them anyway.

I drift in and out, alerting people about the upcoming meeting. In the main room, the spokes are slowly moving towards accepting the original proposal, but no one is particularly happy about it. At 9:48, Enos is almost shouting. "How, exactly, has this plan totally changed in the last two hours? Now they're asking us to submit ourselves to *customs*!" Mac is insisting that the plan hasn't changed, the idea is and has always been to overwhelm customs. By having people come from both sides of the bridge, by having sufficient numbers, we can create a logistical nightmare for them and, eventually, they'll just wave us through.

> Mac: Maybe I'm dense but I don't see how that's different than what Russell is saying. And I don't think the Mohawks will be upset with the idea that we all go through together. Yes, they can detain people at border posts, but it's not all that common, and if we try to get through at another point along the border, we could end up in jail there too.
>
> *Mark*: All right, so the plan is we try the original plan, but we have a backup. I see a lot of nods whenever I hear the words "all or nothing," so do I take it that's our decision too. If anyone is turned back at first, we all leave and fall back on our contingency action?
>
> [*Huge twinkle*]
>
> *Mark*: So that's the proposal. Are there any more concerns.
>
> [*No*]
>
> All right, we can finally move to consensus. Stand asides?
>
> [*No*]

Blocks?

[*No*]

There we have it.

[*Huge cheer rings out*]

Someone: Let's have a round of applause for our facilitators. You guys did an amazing job.

The plan being approved, we move to the next leg, which is logistics. There are two new facilitators. There are speakers from Legal, Medical, and Transport. The legal team starts handing out forms. I head out to meet Kitty and prepare for what everyone's now calling the "10:15 meeting."

"Plan B"

Then, something interesting starts happening. Somehow, it's not at all clear when, the plan for a Ya Basta! meeting transmogrifies into something else. It becomes a meeting, sponsored by Ya Basta!, for everyone who feels stifled by the structure of the spokescouncil, and who wants to talk about strategies for actually getting through. When I first walk into the room, I'm startled: there's at least sixty people already around the table, a pretty substantial chunk of the activists still in the building, and more trickling in steadily. To some degree, I think many came just for an excuse to sound off. The first ten minutes were an endless gripe session, with an emphasis on just how little they or some members of their affinity group were prepared to submit themselves to customs (endless priors, outstanding warrants, etc.). There was one girl who was seventeen years old, who had run away from home a year before. She and her family had since reconciled, but she was still officially listed as a missing person; presumably, if she tried to cross the border, not only would she be held, but anyone in the same car could be arrested as her kidnappers. Many are especially bitter after having abandoned other, perfectly viable options, such as unpatrolled stretches of forest or obscure rural roads, or chances to cross the border weeks before. Everyone accepts that, yes, we have no choice but to attend the fish-fry. Solidarity is important. Anyway we made a commitment and we have to respect our allies, even if, as some suspect, they hadn't been completely honest with us. But just what are our chances of overwhelming customs, anyway? Who has real information? And if it's not possible, isn't it about time we start working on some kind of Plan B?

I run off to locate Eric, who was, at the time, NYC DAN's de facto media working group (much as I was for Ya Basta!, except he had some idea what he was doing). Eric had been keeping up with developments from the tech booth, and he gave me a quick briefing as to what he understands the official plan is now. After the fish-fry, we will all march to the bridge. It will be a peaceful march, with 50–100 Warriors and their families, including children, mingling together with activists. Then, hopefully, we overwhelm them. A lot of people are skeptical it'll work. But it seems the best we can come up with.

As the gripe session continues, I dart in and out trying to find people (Twinkie passes by: "What's this?" "It's a meeting of people who want to prioritize actually getting to Québec. Um, want to come?" "No!" She rolls her eyes in exasperation.)

Finally, I locate Mac, who looks jolted to discover upwards of eighty people in a meeting he didn't even know was happening. "Um, what is the relation of this meeting with the spokescouncil still going on in the next room?"

People ignore the question and launch into questions of their own. One Black Bloc kid from the West Coast with bad teeth is asking what is likely to happen if someone is detained:

> Bad Teeth: If someone is detained trying to pass through the border—which I would definitely be, if I submit myself to customs—what's most likely to happen? What will the Warriors do?
>
> Mac: I would advise you to stay towards the back. If we overwhelm customs, then you won't need your ID. Otherwise, people in front will be turned back and we'll all turn back in solidarity.
>
> Bad Teeth: But what would the Mohawk Warriors do? I *know* I'll be towards the back. I don't need you to tell me that. That's obvious. I want to know if the Mohawks have told us what *they'd* do?
>
> Mac: They'll cross along with us. Obviously, they're not going to attack the border post or anything like that, but as a collective we need to protect each other and, if they turn people back, then fuck 'em. We'll just go somewhere else.
>
> Someone: I don't get it. The Band Council asked us not to block the bridge, to keep a lane open. If we're going to try to overwhelm customs, we'll obviously be effectively blocking the bridge. So we're already defying their will. Why would taking it a little further be so different?
>
> Mac: Look, I don't have a magic answer, all I know is that as a collective we're stronger than as individuals.
>
> Someone: Yeah. And also a hell of a lot slower.
>
> Kitty: My personal feeling is that we're here to come up with an alternative plan of what to do if we get turned away—because if we say "all or nothing," then, let's be honest here: we're probably going to get turned back pretty quickly. Does anyone want to speak to that?
>
> Someone else: Well, does anyone have a map?
>
> Mac: I'll go get one.

I step out with Mac for a second as he does so, just to check in. I can hardly imagine what a nightmare this all must be for him. “The problem” he says, “is they all want magic answers. There aren’t any magic answers. Anyway, what exactly *is* the relation of that meeting to the spokescouncil?”

I say “I think people realized that, at the rate the spokes is going, there’s no way we’re going to have a plan down by 11PM when the building closes. So they decided to constitute themselves as an autonomous working group of people who really wanted to get through.”

“Oh. Well, I guess there’s no reason they *couldn’t* do that.”

“Anarchy in action.”

“Uh huh.”

Before long, everyone inside is looking at maps and discussing logistics, but we hardly get started before someone sticks his head in to tell us it’s 11PM and we’re supposed to be out of the building. People gather on the steps. As cars drive by playing Ramones songs, Eric tries to kidnap me to join with a couple other members of the newly created Media Working Group, to blast-fax some kind of statement from Russell. I tell him I can’t, I had promised to meet up with my housemates at 11:30. The media team heads off to find an open coffee shop. By 11:30, people are still drifting out of the building (no one had actually come to lock it yet) and I finally find my people—Rufus, Warcry, Chango, plus now also Betty the Dancer—who it turns out have all been sitting for some time in a park not far away, under an elm tree, sharing clove cigarettes, waiting for our ride. Kitty, and a large cluster of mostly black-clad activists, set off in another direction, to work on our Plan B. They look rather obvious with their two giant red-and-black flags.

Finally our car arrives, with two women in it already. We all somehow manage to squeeze in.

Most of us are just exhausted. The driver, Sara, a woman in her late twenties, is venting about hygiene issues. She launches into a long diatribe about activists who refuse to wash.

“Oh, yes, the ‘Cruddies,’” said Rufus, agreeably.

“Maybe I’m just old, but I think it’s unsociable. It’s disrespectful of others.”

“What cruddies?” I hadn’t noticed anyone who gave off a noticeable odor at the spokes.

“You know, all those kids with the dirty dreadlocks and crusty clothes, who are pleased with their own body odors? They’re all like eating beans and breaking wind and smelling and refusing to wash?”

“Oh.” Since there seemed little point in arguing, I remark that several groups representing people of color that DAN had worked with in Philadelphia had always made an issue of that sort of thing. “Smelly white anarchists” had become a kind of code word—a form of racial privilege being waved in their faces.

But Sara is not much interested in the racial aspects. "Don't get me wrong," she continued. "I understand the appeal. When I was sixteen I was exactly the same way. I was in love with my own personal smell. It was like… well, natural. That's what human beings are actually supposed to smell like. There's a certain kind of integrity, I do understand that. But come on! There comes a point where you have to start thinking about other people." It emerges that, after living for some years as a squatter, Sara had finally gotten a real job in town, with some sort of nonprofit. With a salary, benefits, everything. She was still trying to get used to the new life.

"It's a phase, I guess. I mean, are there any unwashed activists who *aren't* teenagers?"

Her friend Janna, a Catholic Worker from Denver, however, is very much on the racial issue. "I'm still trying to figure out if I should be really angry about this whole thing. I think I really should. The whole process was completely racist."

"Racist in what way?"

"Racist because we were just working with one tiny group, and didn't even try to contact anyone else in the community. It was always 'the Mohawks' say this, 'the Mohawks' want that. As if they're all like one person. Really they were just talking to two or three people the whole time. Notice how we were even doing it in the spokescouncil. 'The Mohawks.'"

Now, this is cutting a bit close to home. "Okay," I said, "you certainly have a point about the language, I'll give you that, but…" I paused for thought."Well, what *would* you have wanted the organizers to do?"

"They should have talked to everyone in the community."

"And went behind our allies' backs? I don't know. It's really easy to start throwing around words like 'racism' when somebody fucks up. But what if we were were dealing with a community of, oh, I don't know, French people? Or Swedes or something? Would we have behaved any different? Wherever we go, we're always going to be talking to the most radical elements in the community (and actually, in this case, it was them that contacted us). If we had started making independent overtures to Mohawk politicians behind their backs, people would be saying we were racist for doing *that*."

"Well," she concluded, "maybe the racist accusation is unfair. But I'm still angry."

"I'm not real happy myself."

Later That Night

Eventually, they dropped us off at the home of our host, an elderly Quaker woman who had volunteered her house for activists. It was a cozy, carpeted two-story house with a terrace so full of potted plants it was a little like a greenhouse, and a parrot flying around free of its cage. About eight or nine people arranged sleeping bags on the floor. We commiserated over the death of Joey Ramone. Warcry won permission to use the computer in the study upstairs; a while later, she asked me to come up and look at the draft of a story she'd been working on about Timothy McVeigh. Eventually, I drifted downstairs again and ended up in a fairly long conversation with our host about the Society of Friends. Her husband had recently died, but she had children and grandchildren in Burlington and the vicinity. She was from an old Quaker family and had been active in the Church and local activism all her life. So is it true, I asked, that Quaker meetings work by consensus? Because anarchists' do too, and I'd heard that ultimately a lot of what we do was inspired by the Society of Friends. She launched into a fairly detailed description of how Quaker meetings operated, interrupted only occasionally by wondering comments by me ("Wow, that's *so* similar."). People, she said, sit in a circle. If the spirit moves them to they speak, proposals are made and any one person there can, in theory, block a proposal if they feel sufficiently strongly about the matter. Blocks rarely actually happen, but, in principle, anyone has the power to derail any proposal and the fact that everyone knows that they can is itself enough to ensure they act responsibly. Yes, I said. Precisely the way we do it, too. Giving everyone the power to block is like telling people, "We dare you to act responsibly." And, generally speaking, unless you're dealing with a total wingnut, that's all it takes.

She continued: in a Quaker meeting itself, there's always a facilitator, who is not supposed to give his own opinion, but simply run the meeting, listen, and repeat if something needs to be clarified. (Uh, huh. That's just like us too.) Participants can speak only to the facilitator. There's no cross-talk.

"Wait, you mean no one is allowed to speak to each other at all?"

"No. Conversation is for secular events. A meeting is a sacred event, so you can only speak to the facilitator."

"Oh, that's… really different. In our meetings the facilitators keep stack—that is, watch for who wants to speak and keeps count of whose turn it is—but it's not like you can only speak to them. Usually, you are speaking to everyone, but you *are* allowed to make a direct response to someone else's point. So, you can't do that in a Quaker meeting?"

"No, you can only speak to the facilitator."

"Why?"

"Because otherwise it would be a secular event."

I reflected for a moment—between the Thanksgiving ritual, Russell's prayer, the Quaker notion of meetings as spiritual events—whether there was some significance to the fact that the "process" anarchists are so obsessed with is always, elsewhere, seen as partaking of the sacred. Creating accord is the creation of society. Society is god. Or, perhaps, god is our capacity to create society. Consensus is therefore a ritual of sacrifice, the sacrifice of egoism, where the act brings into being that very god. But I was far too tired, and my brain too fuzzy, to do more than make a mental note of it. Anyway, one thing I did know is that, if this action was going to be anything like the other ones I'd been to, I'd be getting at best two or three hours sleep for the next few nights, and maybe nothing. I mumbled some pleasantries and went to bed.

AKWESASNE

Thursday, April 19

The next morning we got up, did something or other in the IMC in Burlington, picked up something else at the Quaker Meetinghouse, full of activist magazines and flyers, and set off on the caravan. We're only rolling at 10:46AM.

There are five Ya Basta! vans out of the twenty or so that make up the caravan, which is followed by a rented bus. Warcry had brought huge tinsel streamers from some IMC event to festoon the vehicle. As long as it's going to be a festive event, she says, we might as well look the part.

The caravan has a comms system, walkie-talkies distributed every couple vehicles or so, and we have one, but the comms people spend most of their time monitoring the state troopers who escort us out of town, and appear, periodically, with cameras filming us at different points along the way. Aside from that there's not much to communicate but periodic messages like "gorgeous waterfall coming up on the left" or "good music on 105.7."

In the van, I'm flipping through an endless stack of documents downloaded from listservs and web pages before I left. There's one about the difference between American and Canadian legal systems and how it might affect protesters. There's a document about how to deal with the effects of tear gas and pepper spray, and two different documents about hypothermia. There's a document with pointers on how not to make an ass of yourself on a Mohawk reservation, and another, meant to give activists some background on nationalist sensitivities in Québec. Unlike Montréal, the average man or woman on the street in Québec City cannot be assumed to speak English. They will not take offense if your French is poor, it is much better to make the attempt than to simply accost them in English. My favorite is a circular by the "Québec Medical Fashion Brigade" with detailed advice on clothing:

> Today's well-dressed militant in Québec City for the Summit is wearing long underwear made of the new synthetic materials like soft warm polyester that WICKS away sweat from your skin. Much of the Summit's perimeter is perched on a hill, and climbing up streets to reach it, or running here and there, will make you sweat. And sweat next to skin can make you cold…

> You should have many loose layers that can be removed if you get hot, and put back on when cold… Your outer layer should be water proof. We HIGHLY recommend a cheap rain suit - not only will this keep you dry against the rain or snow, but also keep those nasty pollutants like tear gas and pepper spray from being absorbed by your clothes. As a bonus, it will block the wind too. If you wear fleece, make sure it is beneath your rain gear if you are in a chemical weapon risk zone (near the police). Pepper spray & tear gas gets sponged up by fleece, and then released over time into your face. Yuck! For that extra sexy look, try out those cheapo translucent ponchos folded up in a little plastic bag—it will look like a condom, and you will get extra kudos for your safe sex message!
>
> We understand the objections you might have to not being able to get rain gear in basic black. However, your plastic rain suit is a perfect medium for spray painting (black, right?), magic markers, and all your stickers. Black garbage bags can also work against water and chemicals…

There follow suggestions about gas masks, goggles, the use of bandanas soaked in vinegar as protection against tear gas. I check myself for extra socks, layers, etc. The caravan is moving almost unimaginably slowly, something like 45 MPH on a two-lane highway, and no one is quite sure why.

"I don't suppose we could at least put on our Ya Basta! outfits for the fish-fry?" someone asks. "It'll probably be our last chance, since there's no way we're getting any of that through customs."

"I don't think so. Mac was saying if we even show up looking like we're prepared for action, it might be taken as aggressive."

"Well… maybe we actually *will* overwhelm them at the bridge."

No one seems to think this is particularly likely.

Hours go by. We move to small rural roads, rolling past abandoned farms and gun shops, going even slower. Someone is explaining his activism all goes back to a childhood realization that the Power Rangers were really evil. Periodically cops film us from the side of the highway, some in uniform, others plainclothes. When we pause for a pit-stop by a river, most of us come out in masks, and some of the men gallantly form a human wall to allow the women some privacy from the cops on the other side of the road, who insist on trying to film them while they pee. At least there are no roadblocks. Finally, after a seeming eternity, maybe around 4PM, the radio crackles "we have a visual on Akwesasne."

Akwesasne Itself

There was not, as it turns out, anyone to greet us at the main entrance to the reservation, though this might, I reflect, have something to do with the fact that we are by now something like three hours late for a party that was supposed to start at 1PM. Anyway, the scene is desultory. Everything about Akwesasne seems desultory. The caravan proceeds through the reservation to occasional curious stares but there is almost no one even on the porches.

Finally, we pull into a very large space of grass with tables set out for the fish-fry. There are no children. Actually, there is hardly anyone at all. Just a few dozen activists who had been waiting around since noon, a few members of the press, and what looks like four actual Mohawks. Later it grows to six. The food, served on paper plates, is dished out by what appears to be a skeleton crew; everything is minimal; the Boots family is there (Stacey does indeed have his hair cut in a Mohawk, which is somehow strangely gratifying). There are a couple other Warriors who show up now and then to talk to them, apparently scouting police positions over the hill, but that's about it. It is obvious we have been totally outmaneuvered. The community is absent. Even the location turns out to be an empty lot that is, we later learn from one of the journalists, technically just over the line and not quite on the Reservation itself.

Several activists wander around trying to locate someplace to pee; there are no porta-potties or obvious outhouses, and no one is sure whether it would be considered desecrating Indian land. Finally, someone tells them that the chiefs have said it's okay to go in the underbrush, as long as we're relieving ourselves in the opposite direction from the Reservation. I grab some fish with Warcry, until someone calls us over to speak to a news team from PBS *Frontline*. Warcry shifts instantly, effortlessly, from grumpy to passionate, extemporizing a little speech on the connection between indigenous oppression and the FTAA. I stand by, slightly bemused, and make a little statement of my own about solidarity, then wander off again.

A little ways off, I find Twinkie sitting by herself, on a wooden bench, crying.

I sit down next to her. "What's the matter, Twinkie? I mean, I'll admit the scene is a little depressing…"

"No, it's not that," she said, trying to smile, even as the tears continued. "It's the fish." There are remains of a pickerel still on her plate.

"The fish?"

"I'm a vegetarian. My family is from Thailand. We were brought up very strict Buddhists."

"Then, why did you eat it? I'm pretty sure they had a vegan option. Cornmeal porridge, no?" Twinkie was, though I hesitated to point it out at that moment, something of an expert at extracting the fish and crab meat from dumpster-dived sushi rolls.

"Well, I thought it would be a gesture of solidarity. After all, here we are on their land. And they made them for us specifically. And, when I was actually eating it, it was okay. But afterwards I just started crying."

I considered making some kind of philosophical observation about how everybody was feeling caught in double-binds of late, but decided not to. Instead I said: "Really? I didn't know your folks were from Thailand. I thought I'd heard someone say you were from the Philippines!"

"Huh? No! We're from Thailand."

"Were you born there?"

"I was pretty young when my family came over."

There is a brief ceremony, starting with Stacey Boots giving a little speech from the top of the van. He talks about the history of Native Americans welcoming and protecting foreigners who came with peaceful intentions. "And now, I guess, we'll protect you." A Latina activist from New York gets up and gives a speech about how the FTAA is just the latest manifestation of a five-hundred-year campaign of conquest and genocide that began with Christopher Columbus. A folksinger climbs on top of the van with a guitar and plays something called "The Indian Wars." After one or two spontaneous spoken-word performances from activists, the caravan reassembles and we head up the ramps toward the "toll plaza" where, apparently, we're going to actually try to cross the border.

Border Action Manqué

Our van is toward the front of the caravan, maybe five cars from the front: me, Warcry, Betty, Rufus, Sasha the documentary filmmaker, and his girlfriend Karen, who is helping him on his video project, since Sasha is at this point going basically as an activist. Karen, on the other hand, is nothing if not a media professional, armed with expensive equipment, and will be documenting everything he does.

There was a long and extremely slow-moving line of vans leading to the border station, which was a cookie-cutter, white, one-story structure with what looked like at least a hundred police officers of various sorts gathered outside, behind numerous barricades. So much for the idea of proceeding directly to the center of the bridge and overwhelming them on the other side. Everyone was going to be checked on this side. We had promised to keep a lane open so emergency vehicles could get through, but it immediately filled with people on foot. At first, as activists began marching up the ramp, the event had some of the quality of a festive march: there was someone on stilts, there were drums, scattered musical instruments, a few attempts at rousing chants. But it was entirely unclear whether this was actually an action. Then, everything stopped. Warcry goes out to scout and never returns. I stick my head out to see if I can catch any signs of our supposed Warrior escort, and aside from one or two who had been on the podium, didn't see anyone. Certainly no families.

Almost nothing we had been promised had actually materialized.

Betty heads off for a cigarette break, then returns. I end up in a long conversation with her about gender issues, the disastrous Ya Basta! trainings, and the resultant crack-up. "It's not like I actually *want* to cut off a bunch of little boys' penises," she says. "I mean, I understand that little boys need their penises. I really don't mind if they feel the need to wave them around a bit. All I wanted was to get a word in edgewise. But, as soon as I raise the issue, they all start screaming at each other, and now they won't even speak to each other and I feel like it's all my fault."

"Were they really screaming at each other?"

"Okay, maybe not literally screaming…"

After a while. "So what do you think? Should I go try to find out what happened to Warcry?"

"Sure," says Betty. "We'll probably be sitting here for another hour one way or the other. Go stretch your legs. Catch some air. It'll be good for you."

Karen volunteers to come with me to see if she can get some useful footage. Sasha gives her a kiss and takes over driving.

I climb out and stroll up towards the toll plaza. As I pass, Moose is taking a cigarette break a couple vans up, looking sheepish, trying to avoid eye contact. There are no Mohawks anywhere in sight now. Neither is there any sign of postal workers, steelworkers, or in fact anyone at all on the Canadian side of the border—though there do seem to be a crowd of Mohawk teenagers behind a chainlink fence in what looks like a huge basketball court some ways beyond the border station, with Mohawk cops patrolling in front of them. A dense crowd of activists is assembled right in front of the border station; some angry, some hoping to talk their way through. There are flags and banners. One woman in black has climbed halfway up a traffic pole, drumming. Periodically, someone tries to start a collective chant. Bad Teeth tries jumping up and down starting a chant of "Days of Rage! Days of Rage!" and a few take it up, but it doesn't really catch on, and fades back into gripes and muttering.

Finally, I see the reason for the delay. The first van is stopped at the border post; the Canadian police have taken out every single bag that was in it and arranged them all on the asphalt, and seem determined to go through every object in every single one of them. Enos, the driver, was one of the first to submit himself to customs—probably not a good idea, since he had already been denied entry to Canada during the April 1st action two weeks before. After a few questions, his name is put through a computer and he's asked to step into a shed-like structure to the side. A minute or two after that we see him being led to a police van, in plastic handcuffs, with a world-weary, exasperated look on his face, a kind of visual sigh.

Warcry is standing with Target and a small cluster of IMC journalists. "Did you see them take off Enos?"

"Yeah."

"So why are we just standing here? I thought it was all or nothing? Let's get the hell out of here and go to someplace we can actually cross."

After a brief parley, we decide we need to do something more dramatic. We'll gather together four or five people who are definitely not going to get through, but probably also won't be actually arrested. Warcry and Target are probably known to every FBI agent in the US, but have no outstanding warrants; I am carrying no passport or official ID; Madhava and Jenka had been denied entry on previous occasions. We decide we'll walk up and formally submit ourselves together. Then, when we're turned back, we can try to turn the line around and head for another crossing.

Karen offers to document the event on video.

The five of us link arms and advance. Karen, looking every inch the professional videographer in a neat beige jacket, her blonde hair tied back, is filming us from up ahead as we advance.

As I step up, I try out a line that had first occurred to me in the van—more than anything else because I'm curious to see what the response will be. "I do hope you bear in mind," I say to the first policeman, looking him in the eye, "that we're only doing this to save your health care plans."

"We're not unaware of that," he says. "That's one reason we've decided to go so easy on you guys."

Oh. Slightly surprised, I wait as they send us each to speak to a different officer. Warcry goes first. Then me. Suddenly I'm being interviewed by a beefy Canadian border officer in a flat white cap.

"Purpose of your trip to Canada?"

"I'm going to protest the FTAA conference in Québec City."

"So, when was the last time you were in front of a judge?"

"A judge? Well, last year I was on jury duty for a couple weeks."

Slight impatience. "You know what I mean."

"As a defendant? Never. I've never stood before a judge accused of any crime."

He nodded. "All right then." Then gestured me on to a younger officer, a pimply kid who looked like he was fresh out of high school. The kid asked me for my passport.

"Sorry, I didn't bring one."

"Driver's license?"

"No. I'm from New York. I don't drive."

Pause.

"A lot of people from New York don't know how to drive."

Karen has somehow talked her way over to the other side of the post and is now filming everything from Canada.

The kid is clearly a bit flustered. He goes off to confer with the beefy guy, who appears to be his commanding officer, then returns. "Well, what *do* you have, then?"

"I have a university ID," I said, pulling it out of my wallet. It was, actually, a Yale faculty ID but nowhere on the card did it actually say "faculty." He probably assumed, as most people did, that I was a grad student. He also didn't seem to care. It had a picture and the picture looked like me.

"Okay," he said.

"What do you mean?

"I mean 'okay.'"

I was startled. "You mean…?"

Pointing. "Just move along to that stop sign over there."

"Wait… You mean I'm through?"

This was one outcome I had never anticipated. I had never even stopped to consider what might happen if I actually got through. The pimply officer was starting to look impatient. Karen was already over the border in Canada; there was an endless line of people waiting behind me, and equally endless-looking bridge in front.

"Well, look," I said. "I have an agreement with my friends. I promised I wasn't going without them. Can't I just wait for them?"

"You can't wait for them here," he said. "This is the processing area. You're going to have to wait for them there, in Canada."

Since "Canada," at this point, seems to consist of a short piece of tarmac eight or nine feet away, this doesn't seem too inherently unreasonable. Karen comes with me, taking some wide-angle shots of the caravan, which is still immobile on the American side. I'm trying to figure out what happened to Target and Warcry, but they're nowhere to be seen. I think they might have been taken inside for questioning. After a minute or two, though, another border policeman shows up to tell me "You can't wait here inside the border post. If you're going to wait for someone, you'll have to walk over there to that stop sign," pointing again to a sign by the edge of the road.

We comply. The stop sign, however, seems to be a very large stop sign, because it ends up being two or three times as far away as it had seemed from the border station. Now we're on a stretch of asphalt far from anything and, for all my squinting, I can't make out a thing that's going on at the American side. There's still a crowd of school kids behind the fence in the basketball court, and we wave to them, but we're too far away to really see if they wave back.

It was at this point that the huge Mohawk cop with the taser shows up, driving a buggy. One could tell he was a Mohawk cop because on his shoulder is a patch reading "Akwesasne Mohawk Police." Unlike the police at the border station, who ranged from businesslike to almost friendly, this one looks extremely unaccommodating. He informs us that we're on reservation land and we're going to have to move off it and start walking across the bridge. Karen points the camera at him—usually a fairly effective way to elicit better police behavior. He's entirely unimpressed.

"I'm sorry, officer, you see we're just here because the border people told us we had to…"

"You're on Indian land! You're not wanted by the community. We want you out. You will start moving immediately across the bridge."

The presence of the taser struck me as a very compelling argument. Anyway, halfway up the access ramp there was another little post and I could make out a couple of activists—they could only be activists, from the way they were dressed—milling about in the same sort of confusion as we.

"Well, you want to come along?" I asked Karen.

"Seems like I don't have a lot of choice."

"Well, presumably they'd let *you* back. And Sasha is still back with the caravan."

"True. But Sasha would want me to at least try to get some footage from Québec City. I've actually several hours worth of blank tapes and batteries in my bag. And this might be our only chance for one of us to get there."

We start walking up the ramp and discover that the activists we had seen there were, in fact, Kitty from Connecticut along with a couple of her fellow Yabbas—a slender, slightly effeminate Asian kid named Lee, a woman named Andrea—all looking as puzzled as we about having gotten through.

We started walking towards the bridge. After some small confusion, when one group of police told us we couldn't enter the bridge, and another told us we couldn't go back (and negotiating access to a bathroom at a small station at the base of the bridge) we took stock.

Needless to say all the Yabba gear was back in the van. I hadn't even brought my shoulder bag, with my notebooks and other essentials—so convinced had I been that I would not get through. I had the one pocket notebook that was in my pocket at the time; a cell phone with maybe a couple hours juice (no recharger). Otherwise, I had basically what I was wearing: a black hoodie that claimed to have "arctic fill" lining, a black bandana in the pocket, military pants over thermal underwear, three different cashmere sweaters layered over a fairly nice red formal shirt (I find it is useful to have something presentable for passing through police lines). That was it.

My friends were in much the same fix. No one had any gear or baggage. Except Andrea who had a sleeping bag.

"So much for Ya Basta!" says Lee.

"Yeah, it looks like we'll all be doing Black Bloc," Kitty agrees.

"So we *are* going?"

Kitty gazes back towards the toll plaza. "Well, if we go back, what would that mean? The caravan is moving so slowly there's no way we'll be able to even try to cross again until sometime tomorrow."

"There is a 'Plan B' though, isn't there? I mean, you guys did come up with something after the spokes?"

"Well, yeah, that's the thing. We did. We figured it was important to keep it secure, so only two people actually have the maps and know all the details. Problem is, one of them is me."

"The best-laid plans of mice and men." smiles Lee.

"Well, what's the chance both of you got through?" I suggest.

Karen has gone off to shoot panoramic footage off the side of the ramp.

"Anyway, it's not like it was all that amazing a plan. Probably anyone with a good map could have come up with it."

We decide to at least try to check in with our affinity groups, but I'm the only one whose phone is working. Which is somewhat miraculous. Everyone else's cell phone conked out hours before we even got to Akwesasne—no one was quite sure whether because of police interference or because we were just too far out in the boonies. I spend a few minutes trying the numbers for Betty, Rufus, and a variety of people on the legal team. In each case I'm sent immediately to voicemail. The same thing happens when Kitty uses my phone to try to contact other members of her own affinity group.

Finally, she says, "I guess it's kind of obvious what we're going to do. We can stand here and agonize over it for another hour, and then go, or we can get going now. What do you say?"

"I'm game."

Everyone nodded.

And so we began to proceed across the bridge.

The Seaway International Bridge turned out to be almost three kilometers long, and was made up of two different structures, connected by a little island in the middle. The road was mostly empty. Very occasionally, a vehicle would pass by, usually a pickup truck. Occasionally, too, Mohawk police buggies zipped by, apparently just to keep us jumpy. We spent a lot of time gazing down into the St. Lawrence Seaway. The view was extraordinarily beautiful. There were inlets, islands, tiny little boats, chalet-like cabins here and there along the shore. Most of it gave a sense of pristine natural beauty, the contours of a coast hardly changed since the first arrival of human settlers ten thousand years ago. Intellectually, I knew this was anything but true: in fact, one of the themes the Mohawk organizers had wanted us to emphasize was environmental racism. There was a GM plant built right on the border of reservation land on the US side (in fact, I thought I could just about make it out in the mist), and the place was so consistently used for toxic dumping that mothers in Akwesasne were told not to breast-feed and babies were occasionally born with their intestines outside. But from the bridge, all this was almost impossible to imagine. It just looked grandiose, beautiful.

The sun was setting by the time we arrived in Cornwall.

CORNWALL

I'm still not sure what the town of Cornwall looks like; I never saw it. What I saw was a kind of loose mall at the end of the bridge, a small, low open space with retail outlets perched on eminences to either side. At the very foot of the bridge, we passed two lines of riot police, maybe forty of them in all, geared up and just standing there, facing a small crowd of perhaps a hundred or two hundred Canadian activists who were clearly the remnants of a much larger crowd. Some were masked. Most looked tired. Both sides seemed slightly ridiculous, dwarfed by the vastness of the bridge. We never saw the promised tea, but we did pass one banner from the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, welcoming us. Karen dutifully filmed it. Everywhere there were people with cameras but very few seemed to be our cameras. We passed Shawn Brant, standing on the back of a pickup truck making some sort of defiant declaration for Canadian television. He looked just like he did in the photographs.

Scattered among the Canadians were other Americans who, like us, were trying to come to terms with the fact that they had gotten through. Gradually, people began clustering, found a spot on a strip of damp grass near the highway to form a mini-spokes to assess our situation.

Our group split up temporarily to get food. I picked up a cheap chicken sandwich at a take-out joint up the hill, investigated the Walmart. I had never been in a Walmart before. It was vast. I picked up a small bottle of Tylenol with codeine, which I remembered one can get over the counter in Canada, figuring it might come in handy later on. Returning, I discovered the meeting in full session, with some forty American activists sitting in a circle, trying to put together a list of names to convey to Legal so people's affinity groups back in Akwesasne will know they're okay, they got through, and to go on without them. We have to hold the meeting masked because we're soon surrounded by TV cameras. When one extremely self-righteous CBC video journalist refuses to stop filming people's faces, a few of us are finally obliged to strongly imply we might be inclined to spraypaint his lens. Karen films the confrontation, then uses her camera to document his every move as he eventually starts packing up his equipment. There's nothing that annoys TV journalists, she explains, more than filming *them*.

Finally I'm assigned to call in the list on my dying cell phone. I leave a record-ing on the legal office's machine in New York and a couple other places, and hope it somehow gets back to people.

By this time it's dark. The mall is almost empty. Even the cops are gone. There were a few vans when we arrived, most were already leaving during the spokes, including one or two full of Mohawk activists—almost everyone who was actually there at the fish-fry. Mac and Lesley appear and disappear. For a while, I'm afraid we won't find a ride, but we do, with some School of the Americas protesters, one of the only groups at Akwesasne whose vehicle actually got through. By 10PM we're on the road to Québec City.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS, QUÉBEC CITY

At this point I'll return to diary mode. What follows is built up largely from notes quickly jotted at the time, fleshed out from memory and later checked against those of other participants, and published (usually web-published) first-hand accounts.

Friday, April 20, 2001

2:30AM

I have always had a stubborn inability to sleep in moving vehicles. Kitty and the Connecticut crew quickly pass out in the back of the van. Karen and I, insomniac, end up having a long conversation with Janna, the Catholic Worker from Denver, who is there with the SOA contingent. Janna is actually a pagan, but for radicals in that part of the country, she explains, there's not a lot of choices. "I'd have joined Pagan Worker if such a thing existed." She was gassed in Seattle and had been in and out of hospitals for six months afterwards. On the third day of the protests, she explained, they brought in the National Guard, who started using CS, a form of tear gas so powerful only the military is allowed to employ it (when the Serbian army used it against rebels in Kosovo, the US government called it a war crime). One pregnant woman lost her baby; another activist died of complications some months afterwards. Janna's doctors told her that her lungs had been seriously damaged, and that she should avoid any future exposure to such toxins at all cost.

"Which made her slightly crazy, I admit, to be going to Québec City. But some things are just too important."

5:30AM, We Arrive

The SOA people drop us off at Laval University, on the edge of the city. Both

New York and Connecticut Ya Basta! already have sleeping spots reserved for us on the floor of the main gymnasium. A teenager working the late-night desk points us in the right direction—yes, he remarks, the university has been quite generous with their facilities. "They were afraid we'd occupy the campus."

The gym looks like it's about the size of a football field. Its shiny hardwood floor is covered with perhaps two thousand sleeping activists, arranged in geometrical clumps separated by walls of bags and backpacks. We pick our way through the bleachers (also covered with sleeping bodies), eventually locate our appointed spot, D17, which is sectioned off with white tape, and toss our meager possessions on the pile.

The Connecticut kids never go to sleep, though. After almost an hour setting up, washing, and conferring, Kitty announces: "I know it's really fucked up, but we've kind of decided we'd better start looking for some gear or we're going to be completely useless on the streets today." The three of them, Kitty, Lee, and Andrea, have pooled and are counting out their money, which comes to around forty dollars. I lend them a credit card and they vanish in search of supplies. This does, at least, mean that Andrea, who had been wise enough to carry a sleeping bag, leaves it behind (there was some discussion of using it as padding, but we conclude it would be too annoying to carry it around). Karen and I arrange it as a kind of long pillow, throw down our jackets and sweaters as mattresses, and grab a couple hours sleep.

8:30AM

Almost everyone is starting to get up. Groggy activists are yawning, stretching, fumbling for toothbrushes, searching for the bathroom. Karen and I decide to head down to the IMC to get Karen an Indymedia pass. This way she can be filming in some sort of official capacity. It might, conceivably, afford some slight protection against arrest. This requires padding about in the halls of Laval—one of those grey modernist complexes with vast fluorescent halls that make you feel like you're underground even when you probably aren't—with cups of bad vending-machine coffee, looking for some table with maps and information. Eventually, we find one, manned by a couple of bleary-eyed students who try to explain the local bus system.

Happily, buses are still running; though we never quite figure out the ticket system, and it looks like bus conductors aren't bothering to collect them anyway. We follow the map up towards the IMC, which I vaguely remember from my last visit. Just a block away, we encounter a miracle. There, on the corner, plain as day, is an Army/Navy store. It's still open! And there, in the plate-glass window, large as life, is a gas mask. I dash in and ask if they still have any in stock, and—equally miraculously—it turns out that they do. Precisely one. Forty bucks Canadian.

And it's one of those good, Canadian military gas masks, too, with the filter on the side, not like the crappy civilian-issue Israeli gas masks from the first Gulf War everyone complains about, where the eyes fog up and the plastic isn't even shatterproof. This one is thick black plastic, with a dozen straps on the back in black with fine yellow stripes that are to my eyes, at that moment, strangely beautiful.

We also each pick up a camera bag.

The IMC (no one is calling it the CMAQ any more, at least, in English) is located on a cobblestone avenue on a very steep hill—so steep, in fact, that the building it's in is two stories on one side and five on the other. It appears to be largely empty; you enter through a recently refurbished storefront area that looks like it's temporarily attached to some radical group (it's unfurnished except for a couple chairs and posters on the wall). Visitors have to proceed through the empty offices then head downstairs to the IMC itself—still half empty, though there are a number of media activists sleeping in corners and about a dozen more playing with equipment, or pasting up lists of tasks, collective rules. I glance at one sheet on which participants can assign themselves to cover different events (the operation has, as Madhava predicted, been successfully democratized). At the front desk is a short, bearded, gnome-like fellow who seems to be engaged in a prolonged flirtation with the two young women at the computers behind him (they do little but mock him, and he seems to take great delight in their mockery). He snaps a digital photo of each of us and then cheerfully remarks that because of some sort of computer glitch, it's been impossible to print new press badges all day. He's working on it. After about half an hour, we finally do manage to secure badges. I get one too: after all, I will definitely be covering this story for *In These Times*, a Chicago magazine I write for. Karen and I both sign solemn statements saying we agree to the IMC principles of unity, and to contribute at least an hour of our time to some sort of work for the IMC at some point in the future. "Don't worry about that right now," remarks one sleepy activist, "but we'll probably be needing all sorts of help over the next day or two. Just check back in."

Then, armed with gas mask and press badge, we head back to the university.

11:00AM, Convergence, Laval University

All the fuss about defending the Convergence Center turns out to have been something of a red herring. Once the idea of converging on the Plains of Abraham had to be abandoned for fear of preemptive attack, the decision was to fall back on the university. The university, however, is seven miles from the perimeter. It's going to be a very long march.

By the time we get there, there are already thousands of people, most scattered across a vast open quadrangle near the gym where we'd slept, preparing for the CLAC/CASA Carnival Against Capitalism march. Almost immediately, I run into people I know. Sam, active with the New York IWW and DAN Labor, had not been with the caravan but had come to Akwesasne independently, and somehow got through. He had hitched up with a carload of radio activists and independent journalists: two couples, Shawn (not to be confused with Shawn Brant, the Mohawk organizer) and Lyn, Ben and Heidi. They are mostly in their thirties, which makes them—like me—rather old by activist standards. Since we're all separated from our usual affinity groups, we decide to constitute ourselves as a new one, which I dub "the Akwesasne Refugees." After a brief huddle, we come to a quick consensus about our parameters and role. We will follow the main action, acting partly as reporters, partly as participants. Our participation will be red/yellow in orientation, but we'll concentrate on providing support rather than direct confrontation. We will stay mobile, try to avoid arrest, separate when we care to, but if we do, always establish times and places to meet up afterwards.

Happily, Shawn has secured a place to stay: Heidi has a friend Pierre who is building himself a house in the Lower City. It's unfinished but perfectly serviceable if we don't mind sleeping on the floor. Shawn also has a car.

Now, all this puts me in a rather odd situation because I am now, effectively, in two different affinity groups: since I'm also a de facto member of the Yabba group, even though this now consists of three kids, all around twenty years old, who have gone off to join the Black Bloc. Well, I figure, it will give me a certain flexibility to be able to go back and forth.

We select a large green banner near a woman on stilts dressed as the Statue of Liberty, and decide that if anyone wanders off, this will be our reconvergence point.

So I wander off, notebook in hand. Karen breaks out the camera.

This part of the campus was all huge quadrangular spaces and concrete, with a distinct lack of greenery. At the moment, however, it was filled with an enormous variety of colored banners, furled and unfurled, some just solid unusual colors—salmons and lavenders—but also endless variations on red and black. Everywhere, young people were sipping bottled water or cups of bad microwaved coffee, milling about, sitting in circles, playing snatches of beats on drums made from inverted five-gallon water bottles, fiddling with gear. The weather was still crisp, but gave every sign of wanting to turn into a genuine spring day. No cloud in the sky. The snow that had covered much of the city a month before had melted. I set out in search of Ya Basta! people, without much luck. At one point, I saw a cluster of men who looked, from a distance, like a Tute Bianche affinity group, but it turned out they were actually all dressed as the Québec City mascot "Bonhomme," in smiling Santa-style masks and dirty white jumpsuits.

Jaggi, with an amplified megaphone was going around to each cluster of people to announce that the GOMM parade was to start moving at 12:30PM to the lower city, the CLAC/CASA Carnival Against Capitalism parade, due to leave at 1:00PM, was to proceed down Avenue René Lévesque because the Plains of Abraham had been determined to be a trap.

I grab him for a second.

"Hey, David," he smiles. "So where's Ya Basta!? How was Akwesasne?"

"Kind of a bust. We didn't exactly make it through. As for New York Ya Basta!, at the moment, I think I'm kind of it."

"So everyone else was turned away?"

"We'd made a decision it would be all of us or nothing."

"Huh? Why did you do that? We need all the bodies we can get out here!"

"Well, because…" Come to think of it, why did we do that? I shrugged. "Solidarity. It seemed to make sense at the time."

Jaggi had time to give me only the briefest rundown of what emerged from the last night's spokescouncil. GOMM had their own parade, which would include SalAMI people, and various Trots. They were going to carry out pure Yellow, classic civil disobedience, with lockdowns and the like, below one of the security gates. The CLAC parade, much bigger, would be Yellow (but not "safe Yellow") and also include a Green contingent. The plan is for Green Bloc to veer off before we got to the fence and occupy the area even further down the hill from GOMM, centered in a zone called Ilot Fleuriot beneath the highway overpass, and including the neighborhood of Jean Baptiste. Everyone else will proceed directly to the wall.

Then he ran off.

11:40AM

The Black Bloc at this point is at 250 people, maybe less. Mostly wearing black hoodies, though there are some in military-style gear or even vinyl raingear. All, of course, are in black. Most have gas masks pulled back on top of their heads, and black bandanas tied around their necks. They are mainly lounging about, at this point, smoking or napping, but there's a huge red banner in the front of what is to be their column, and all sorts of red and black flags scattered around. Not far away is a woman dressed as the Statue of Liberty, on stilts, and a little further, a Medieval Bloc with tin pan hats and potlid shields. I am pleased to discover they do, indeed, have a catapult: quite a big one, twenty-five feet long. Around them are a variety of flying squads which seem to me half Black Bloc, with gas masks and bandanas, sometimes even hockey padding, only in cheerful colors, not in black.

A fair number of people in fact are already masked up; not so much for security reasons (there seem to be no police anywhere) as because they have, by far, the coolest bandanas ever: which, if folded in half, cover the bottom half of your face with a life-size picture of the bottom half of someone else's face. I start noticing them everywhere: they come in red, orange and yellow.

Ben already has one, in orange. He proudly displays it: one side is the happy side, with a big smiling face; the other has a face with its mouth taped closed behind barbed wire.

"Yeah, apparently Reclaim the Streets, London, shipped over at least a thousand. They were handing them out earlier, but I guess you missed them. Story was they were designed by this old guy who used to work with the original French Situationists. Or something. I'm not completely sure."

Inscribed on the margin, in French and English, are the following lines:

> We will remain faceless because we refuse the spectacle of celebrity, because we are everyone, because the carnival beckons, because the world is upside down, because we are everywhere. By wearing masks, we show that who we are is not as important as what we want, and what we want is everything for everyone.

The big surprise is our numbers, which everyone is saying seem significantly higher than expected. I keep hearing numbers like five thousand, maybe even ten. There are no police anywhere in sight, though here and there are clumps of legal observers, easily identifiable in their bright yellow vests.

Jaggi keeps dashing up and down with updates and announcements; "In Ecuador, they've occupied the Canadian embassy in solidarity with us!" There are apparently also border actions going on in Mexico and people blockading a bridge in Chicago.

Finally, slowly, lumberingly, the Carnival Against Capitalism gets under way.

1:30PM, The Carnival Against Capitalism March Begins

Maybe twenty minutes into the parade, there's some kind of altercation when a university security guard tangles with someone on the front lawn of a building by the parade route. I arrive as people are trying to de-escalate, and never find out what exactly happened. The house's owner and an eight-year-old boy are standing right there next to their porch. Someone is yelling at him: "Get that kid back in the house! It's not safe with all these cops around!" Someone else tells me the guard freaked out and drew his gun (only to be immediately surrounded by activists with video cameras), but it wasn't clear what had sparked the incident to begin with.

Shortly thereafter (circa 1:50PM), there's another minor tangle when some TV journalists try to drive a car through the crowd. Marchers swarm around it, some pound on it, others lay down in front. "He was an asshole," people told me, but not exactly how—I'm guessing he was just arrogantly trying to push through.

Eventually, the car pulls back to a side street and the march continues.

2:00PM

At first, we're passing through a purely residential area, all family houses and the occasional small brick apartment block. There's not a commercial establishment anywhere in sight. Chants are in French, English, even Spanish. Most are extremely familiar: "Ain't no power like the power of the people cause the power of the people don't stop!" "Who's streets? Our streets!" "*El pueblo, unido, jamas sera vencido.*" Others would become so: "*Sol! Sol! Sol! Sol-i-dar-i-té!*"

Karen checks in, she has been ranging up and down the parade getting all sorts of useful footage. There are cameras everywhere, but this time, they're almost all our cameras. Even the people photographing us from the side of the road seem not cops but ordinary citizens.

Marches, I note, are always somewhat accordion-like. They have a tendency to stretch thin over time, which means we have to stop periodically so everyone can reassemble their affinity groups. The Black Bloc, never large, is by now already becoming more diffuse. I take advantage to work my way into the middle and finally locate my Connecticut friends: who are now part of an affinity group of some six or seven people, having located a few other former New England Yabbas. They are calling themselves La Resistance (later it becomes La Resistance II, when they discover the name is already taken). Kitty has given herself the action name Kid A, though everyone keeps forgetting to use it. Lee—a strict vegan—is calling himself Cheesebacon, and Andrea is still just Andrea. She's the only one who has a gas mask (it had been wrapped in her sleeping roll). The others sport newly acquired green military helmets and a variety of other gear they'd picked up in town earlier. "Thanks so much for the cash card," says Lee, handing it back to me. "You're a life saver. I promise I'll send you back the money."

"Oh, don't worry about the money."

"No, really. I promise I'll get your address after the action and I'll get it back to you."

2:10PM

Whoops all around as the march stops.

Nobody around knows why.

The Black Bloc are marching immediately behind what seems to be some kind of Marxist group, carrying a dozen identical red flags emblazoned with images of US political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal. You can tell the Marxist groups because, like union folk, they tend to wear some kind of uniform. In the States there's a group called the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade, who come to big actions in Black Bloc attire, except all in identical T-shirts under their hoodies and all wearing the exact same red bandana—looking so perfectly like anarchists that you knew they couldn't actually be anarchists, because, even though the whole idea of black blocs is that everyone is indistinguishable, no group of anarchists would ever really be dressed exactly the same. I don't see any equivalent here in Québec City (though, I later learn they were in fact there, mixed in with the Black Bloc). There are, however, many sections of the parade that obviously represent one or another socialist group, usually identifiable by matching T-shirts and the fact they carry professional-looking, printed signs. The larger socialist blocs are conducted by marshals with matching arm bands, patrolling the perimeters, linking arms when the march stops. Even the smaller groups usually have a leader with a megaphone, often walking backwards, leading them in chants. This, of course, makes them stand out from the crowd, while the anarchists, with their hand-painted signs and banners, mostly blend in—giving one the vague sense that everyone not affiliated with a particular, identifiable group is most likely an anarchist of some sort or another. In this particular march, this is also probably true.

I sit down on the street for a second to watch the show. After the Mumia brigade passes, and the Black Bloc, comes the Medieval Bloc with their catapult. The catapult is followed by a wooden cart full of stuffed pandas and other soft toys to be used as projectiles. Then come the autonomous elements in all their affinity groups, their signs and flags and banners an infinite anarchist heraldry of every conceivable variation on red and black. (My favorite, a crimson heart on sable field, which I saw repeated with slight variations six or seven times, sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied by the caption "ANARCHY = LOVE"). There were signs: *Autonomez Vous* (Autonomize Yourself), *Betail en Revolte* (Cattle in Revolt), and dozens of plays on the FTAA/ZLEA acronym (FTAA, **F**orced **T**o **A**ccept **A**ristocracy). There are Radical Cheerleaders and Raging Grannies, jugglers, stilt-walkers, and at least one man on a unicycle. At one point, I detect a group chanting "Ya Basta!," spot a Ya Basta! sign among them, and quickly close in—but they turn out to be some sort of Zapatista support group, in T-shirts without any sort of gear. They are immediately followed by the SOA folk wearing skeleton masks, with an enormous green banner.

The only thing missing is giant puppets: I'm told several were carried out the night before for the torchlight parade, but they're hidden away now, waiting for the labor march tomorrow.

2:20PM

Someone announces we're ten minutes from the wall. We're starting to see stores now, mostly shuttered.

An activist in an Easter Bunny suit is trying to throw candies to a group of children watching the parade from an apartment terrace. He becomes an instant celebrity: the "bunny guy," everyone calls him, as in, "Hey, did you see the bunny guy?" He is not however to be confused with the other "bunny guy," a student who actually carried his pet rabbit with him during the march. Bunny Guy manages to land a few on one terrace, and the children eagerly scoop them up.

Onlookers still seem guarded, though their numbers increase. Activists are banging on street signs as they pass, more loud than particularly musical. Here and there are clumps with actual musical instruments.

Still not a cloud in the sky. In fact, it's becoming quite hot. I've been stripping off layers steadily, and those geared up—such as, for instance, my Black Bloc friends—are really beginning to feel it. People are calling for water. I'm sometimes with the rest of the Refugees, who've positioned themselves behind and on the edge of the Black Bloc, sometimes exploring the parade, occasionally touching base with Karen. La Resistance, geared to the hilt, wants water too, so the Refugees scour the streets for someplace to buy some (we did decide we were going to do support work), but without much success. Eventually, I locate a convenience store that's open, but it's only letting people in in groups of two, with some guy posted at the door to lock and unlock it each time. Shawn and I wait in line for a while, but realize that, by the time we get in, we'll have lost the parade entirely.

Shawn, who has been monitoring the local media for some time now, is amazed by the complete absence of police. "For months they've been waging a terror campaign, telling everyone we're going to destroy the city. Now look! Have you seen a single cop? At any point? If anyone had actually wanted to, we could have burned down this entire neighborhood."

"Maybe they're hoping someone does, to give them an excuse to attack."

"Maybe. But my point is: either they knew they were lying when they tried to convince everyone we were a threat to the city, or they don't really give a shit about the people they're supposed to be protecting."

2:25PM

We pass a construction site. A small crowd goes up an alley made by two chain-link fences, but they're not, as I first guessed, going to yank up a stretch of fence to carry with them. Instead, the men and a couple women pull on their masks and start breaking and gathering bricks and rocks. A (mainly female) chorus stands above them chanting "We're Gonna Fuck Shit Up Tonight!" in slightly accented English.

They're not, in fact, in Black Bloc attire, but appear to be students, or maybe just local teenagers. Actually I have no idea who they are, but I'm guessing this would have to be the Red Bloc.

2:40PM

Some Black Bloc'ers are carrying a mattress with them, as a kind of giant shield. Somehow, there's now a truck ahead of them, just past the Mumia battalion, playing some sort of French rap music. Mac and Lesley come bouncing by, masked, in military garb. We exchange pleasantries. Then they disappear again.

The parade stops periodically. Starts again.

2:50PM

The Avenue de Erables is the point where the parade is supposed to split into two columns, Green and Yellow. The Green group will march north up Avenue Cartier, which is two blocks north, and then enter the working-class neighborhood of St Jean-Baptiste that lies on the steep streets that slope off just to the north of the perimeter. Heidi, who has been doing radio interviews up and down the parade, explains that the neighborhood itself, along with the area further north, around the highway, has been declared a Green Zone. Puppeteers and street theater groups will occupy the area and put on performances for the local community groups, who are working closely with us. (CASA had been going door to door in Jean Baptiste for months now with flyers and petitions, explaining what was going to happen.) Such was the plan. At this point, though, it seems not many Greens are actually leaving: even the dragonfly drummers—a theatrical group with diaphanous dragonfly puppets bouncing over their heads—and other obviously Green groups are continuing with us for the time being. Meanwhile, as we pause, someone in a food truck seizes the opportunity to provide a quick snack. Everyone is passing around plates of pasta. We grab some, but pass most of it to La Resistance.

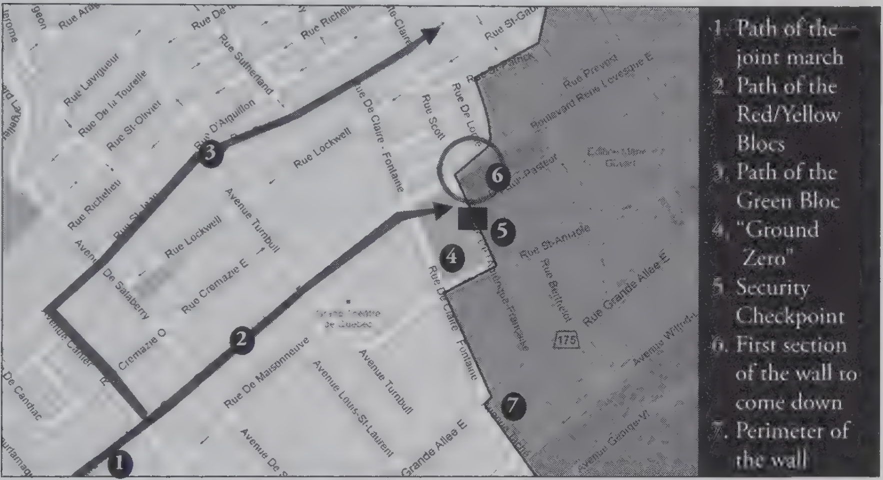
3:05PM

While we are waiting, I head back to the convenience store with Lyn and successfully buy several bottles of water. As I'm heading back we hear rumors three squads of cops have been sighted heading our way (none materialize).

3:15PM

Finally, we're moving. It turns out that, all that time, we were only a few blocks from the wall. Passing Avenue Turnbull, the march enters the area we had scoped out so carefully during our last visit. We pass Grand-Théâtre de Québec, entering a small park that is soon to be known to many of us as "Ground Zero." The park is mostly just a huge lawn with some hillocks and a few small copses of trees here and there. At the far end is the wall, with its three-foot concrete base and seven feet of chain-link on top of it. It runs along the next north-south street, the Rue d'Amerique Francaise, then curves back sharply to the north. Squinting, I notice it is already covered in most spots with ribbons and images and sculptures woven into it during a women's action the night before. The base has been liberally spray-painted.

In the middle of the park is a line of cops, maybe forty or fifty of them, ranked out in full riot gear. We never saw any police that day who weren't fully armored. These ones seem to be there to protect access to a checkpoint/entryway opposite the northeast corner of the park. Otherwise, there's nobody around. Even the two media trucks with satellite dishes sticking out of them seem unattended. Yellow surveillance helicopters rattle overhead.



1. Path of the joint march
2. Path of the Red/Yellow Blocs
3. Path of the Green Bloc
4. "Ground Zero"
5. Security Checkpoint
6. First section of the wall to come down
7. Perimeter of the wall
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
Rue Lavigueur
Rue De la Tourelle
Rue St-Olivier
Rue Richelieu
Rue D'Aiguillon
Rue Sutherland
Rue Lockwell
Avenue Turnbull
Rue Cremazie E
Cremazie O
De Salaberry
Avenue Cartier
De Candiac
Rue De Maisonneuve
Avenue Louis-St-Laurent
Avenue Turnbull
Grande Allee E
Rue De Claire - Fontaine
Rue Scott
Rue St-Gab
Rue Prevost
Boulevard Rene Levesque E
Rue St-Amable
Rue Berthelot
Rue Grande Allee E
175
Avenue Wilfrid-L
Avenue George-VI
Rue De Claire Fontaine

The parade begins to pour into the open space. Everyone is marching directly towards the police. The police hesitate (one can only imagine what it might feel like to be in a detachment of forty-odd riot cops watching several thousand anarchists march directly at you). Then they turn around, march back behind the checkpoint, and we sweep into the park.

Next to me someone is shouting angrily in French and tossing a half-full bottle of water at the retreating cops. A companion takes him gently by the arm, as if to say: "We all know what's going to happen. We shouldn't be the ones to start."

The Black Bloc isn't at the head of the march. The vanguard is completely heterogeneous, though it includes some of the best prepared: many in one or another form of padding, some in helmets and shields. As I pull up to the front, there's already one guy in a yellow jacket who's scrambled up to the top of one section of the wall near the checkpoint (it does not, in fact, have barbed wire on top). He's swaying back and forth, trying to use his own weight to make it wobble. A crowd converges around him with grappling hooks—or, really, they're fist-sized, nut-shaped hooks attached to long strong cords. Others set to work with wire cutters. A faceless line of police, all in gas masks and battle armor, stand impassively, maybe thirty feet away inside the perimeter as the first panel comes off its concrete moorings and collapses to the ground. The police do nothing.

Before long, everyone has found some empty portion of the fence. Mostly, the procedure is like this: small teams with ropes will use hooks to attach them to the chain-link, then everybody streams in to help pull. When the wall starts to give, people will climb on top to force it down. By the time I arrive, there are eight or nine sections down and I have to move northeast of the checkpoint to find a spot where I'm needed. I end up pulling on the same rope as Mac and Lesley and one insanely large Mohawk Warrior (I'm later told such individuals are referred to on the reservation as FBIs, "Fucking Big Indians") who probably has the strength of the three of us combined. Nobody is even wearing masks at this point. I, like many people, have my gas mask perched on top of my head. When our section of the fence comes down, we move on to another one. At one point, a section comes down directly on top of my head, and those of a couple people next to me. We all laugh, two of us shake hands, then we move on to the next spot.

Soon, twisted pieces of downed chain-link fence are scattered across the edge of the perimeter. For some weird reason, the cops are still doing nothing, just standing there. Apparently, they had orders to resist any attempt to enter the security zone, and are taking their orders extremely literally.

Finally, a small squad of activists, I guess about twenty of them, assembles for a charge. To me, it seems completely insane, but maybe they have some kind of plan. If they do, I never find out, though. Because, almost the moment they begin to sprint towards the police, pepper bombs start exploding all around them. Some start stumbling, fall; within seconds, the entire contingent pulls back in disarray.

From that moment on, for the next two days, it was continual chemical warfare. Police started firing up and down the wall at teams still pulling sections down (about 150 feet had been completely cleared at this point). Tear gas canisters started bouncing, spinning, exploding all around us. I pulled on my gas mask; so did about half the people there. (I saw at least a dozen makes of gas mask, Israeli, Czech, Belgian, Canadian, some kind of weird Russian thing with a long tube flowing down to a pouch strapped to your belt.) Others were using scarves, bandanas, whatever was on hand. I saw people fumbling with visors and plastic swimming goggles as tears and mucus streamed down their faces. At one point, as I looked for a new position on the wall, a pepper bomb must have gone off right next to me. Unlike the tear gas, it went straight through my gas mask and I was suddenly blind and couldn't breathe. I stumbled back out of range, into the open air of the park, eyes still burning and unable to focus, gasping for breath, and wandered in a circle for a moment until I found a clear spot, pulled off my mask, and sat down on the grass. After maybe a minute, I was basically functional again.

The park was by then full of clusters of people, moving at different speeds in different directions; it was also spotted with increasingly numerous clouds of gas. At first, they dissipated fairly quickly: there was a strong breeze which, to everyone's amusement, was blowing back directly on the police. Here and there were small groups of activists sitting in circles on the grass on patches of higher ground, engaged in earnest consultations—Yellow affinity groups, I'm guessing, trying to figure out what to do. For most, the decision seemed to be to stay in the park and create as much of a carnival spirit as possible, despite the chemical assault.

By the time I was back at the fence again, a few minutes later, it had turned into a stand-up battle. After laying down a wall of gas, the police apparently tried to advance, only to be driven back by a rain of rocks. Masked figures close to the perimeter, now marked only by the battered concrete base of the former fence, half of it toppled, were still lofting rocks and bottles at them when I arrived. There were a couple pacifists up there, for some reason—at least, a couple women were angrily shouting, "Stop throwing shit!" The cops were by now sheltered behind a line of plastic shields, firing tear gas canisters and plastic bullets directly at them. The pacifists beat a hasty retreat.

Me, too. I fell back on the park and jotted down a few notes.

3:43PM

[*from notes I took during a quiet spell*]

The police at this point are still hopelessly outnumbered. Rock throwers appear whenever they try to advance, but otherwise largely seem to hold their fire. Nor does anyone attempt to advance on the shattered perimeter.

By this time, gas canisters are coming down pretty constantly, not just near the perimeter but everywhere. They're falling like mortar rounds, soaring in arcs way up in the air, usually three to five at once, then falling in clusters, striking throughout the open area of the park. At first, each time one lands, it sets off a small stampede.

Still, it was becoming something of a carnival. People were dancing, drumming, and clapping, trying to create a festive occupied territory in and out of the tear gas clouds. I pass four women doing a dance with gossamer scarves, all of them wearing gas masks. Others are spinning around without even bandanas, just out of sheer defiance.

The Bunny Guy advances on the wall, arms swinging, with great drama. Gassed, he beats a hasty retreat.

There are activists with hockey sticks systematically thwacking the canisters back at the perimeter, and one guy in a gas mask scoops one up, runs up to the perimeter with a plume of gas billowing behind him, and chucks it back over the wall.

"Don't do that without gloves," a medic warns me. "They're red hot. You can get major burns from doing that."

"And that doesn't mean any gloves," says another. "It'll burn right through thin leather. You really need a hockey mitt."

3:50PM

When I find Shawn and Heidi, he excitedly reports that we've foiled the cops' first attempt at a flanking maneuver. They tried to bring up a water cannon—it was basically an armored fire truck—from the northwest, behind the theater, to cut us off. Several Black Bloc affinity groups ran to the scene and disabled it, smashing the windows and attacking the tires until the driver, convinced he was about to be pulled out of the cab, reversed the vehicle and pulled a hasty retreat. No one was hurt, but there were rumors the accompanying squad of police nabbed a few random activists near the scene (not the Black Bloc kids, of course, that would have been too difficult) and took them off with them—possibly the day's first arrests.

We watch from a distance as another line of cops marching towards the theater ends up getting pelted so heavily they too had to retreat. "The ones in blue," Heidi points out, "are provincial police. The ones in green are local, city cops. They're no big deal. It's the blue guys who are the really scary ones, because they're brutal and they get all the high-tech gadgetry."

Someone is claiming they just saw one of the cops near the theater trip, fall down, and thwack the ground repeatedly with his baton in frustration. Another minor victory. Someone hears it, and smiles.

There were all sorts of cameras, everywhere. Many activists are carefully documenting acts of carnivalesque defiance; others are filming the cops. Karen finds us. She says she's choking on the gas and can't film any more; she's heading down to the Green Zone. We say we'll meet her down there later. Almost as soon as she left, I run into Time's Up Bill, a bicycle activist from New York. Bill was unmasked, looking grimly indifferent to the gas, but armed with a huge video camera.

He spots me because I have my mask off for a moment.

"Hey, David, are you busy right now? Would you be willing to do a brief interview about Akwesasne?"

"Sure. Well, how brief are we talking about?"

"Just a minute or two."

I smile. "You want to do it here?"

"Yeah."

We stroll up to a spot with relatively clear air, about forty feet from the checkpoint, and I start giving a brief description of the caravan, the fish-fry, the crossing. About halfway through, we both look up and spot three canisters descending in a graceful parabolic arc directly at our heads. We start running, laugh, reposition ourselves a little further from the action, and finish the interview.

4:10PM

It's turning into a standoff. No one is throwing rocks unless the police try to advance, and for the time being, they're no longer trying. Instead, they just loft endless tear gas and pepper bombs into the park, as activists along the perimeter either toss them back, or throw anything that might look like a response in kind. It started largely as an exchange of tear gas for smoke bombs, which arc in a similar fashion. They are also completely harmless—a purely symbolic tit-for-tat, but somehow very satisfying. Later, people seemed to be shooting off flares, and I saw colored lights that I think must have been Roman candles, bottle rockets, or something. Further off, the catapult was flinging teddy bears over remaining sections of the wall. It was all purely expressive, almost like a matter of principle that we could give as good as we got.

At first, the landing of a canister in a crowd would create a panicked stampede, despite the people shouting not to run. It would happen especially when the police started using canisters that would burst into flames and start spinning crazily, obviously impossible to throw back. Before long, though, the panic subsided, as it was mainly gas-masked or sturdy people who had the wherewithal to remain. Someone showed me the trick of standing directly in front of a group of panicked, fleeing people with your arms spread out; invariably, they would slow down and then stop. But, before too long, the panicked flights pretty much stopped anyway.

4:17PM

At the north of the park, there's a little cluster of trees that's become a kind of observation center for noncombatants. Next to it stand several Mohawk Warriors, including Stacey Boots, who apparently never himself advanced to the wall, but hung back like a proper military leader, giving occasional tactical advice. There are also five or six metalworkers, some Anglophone, some Francophone, unmasked, but carrying bandanas and vinegar just in case. They're not in action, but literally showing the flag: they're surrounding a large placard they've arranged near a tree with their union colors.

It is around this point that I begin noticing, as I probe the zone near the perimeter, that a lot of the masked figures around me are actually friends. La Resistance emerges from the mist, with a general exchange of hugs. A bit further north is Buffy, entirely in black, with a reinforced bicycle helmet and a round garbage lid as a shield. Behind her are most of the other Prince Edwards Islands kids, similarly dressed. She pulls off her mask briefly to wave. If the PEI group is taking the role of peltasts, light and mobile, Montréal Ya Basta! are the hoplites. About twenty of them are standing in formation nearby—with a shield-wall of thirteen and five or six drummers: also in black, mostly, with black motorcycle helmets, black gas masks, and three-foot black plastic shields, but all covered in strange, foam, rainbow padding, with dinosaur spines down their backs, complex shapes emerging from their helmets, pentagram-like symbols on their shields. The drums were made of plastic water-bottles. It's visually extraordinary, though, tactically, somewhat pointless. In such a wide open space, a phalanx is about as effective as the original cop line had been: unless you had a line of hundreds, one could be fairly easily outflanked and surrounded. The shields, however, are highly effective against tear gas canisters and plastic bullets (which the police are beginning to use fairly indiscriminately), if useless for holding ground. The Yabbas seem to have found something of a purpose in simply interposing themselves and drawing fire.

This seems to be the emerging division of labor. The Black Bloc, especially the Americans among them, are taking the role of first line of defense. They're not themselves throwing projectiles, just holding ground—though they're willing to grab any opportunity to rip down new sections of the fence. Everyone throwing rocks seems to be local; I'm guessing many might be those militant seventeen-year-olds Sebastien had been telling me about, who, unlike the Bloc, never subscribed to principles of nonviolence.

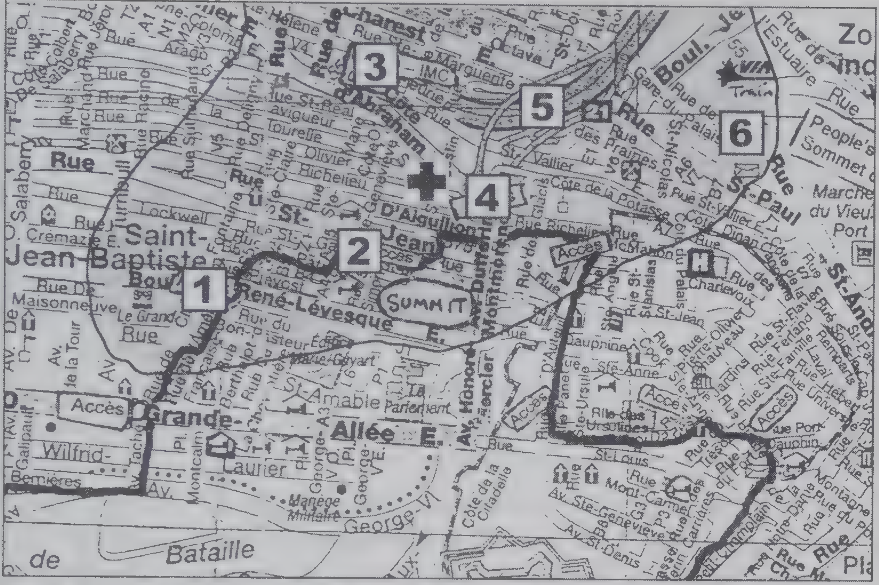
4:22PM

A lot of the action at this point is by the side of the area where the wall first fell: there is a wide street running just below, and another strip of wall as such.

I fall back to the observation post, where the huge Mohawk Warrior I'd shared a rope with earlier seems to have just come back from the fray, apparently for the first time. He's joyously narrating the story of how the wall first came down. Stacey, ever stoic, allows himself a brief smile. He turns to two masked Black Bloc'ers, offering strategic advice.

"Careful to guard your left flank down there and allow an escape route, because, if they sweep up that street and surround you, it can turn into a 'kill zone.' That's how massacres happen."

The police strategy, now that earlier attempts to drive a wedge into the park or cut us off have failed, seems to be to simply pump tear gas—and increasingly nasty tear gas, I notice—into the zone surrounding the wall for hours, until our numbers start to thin. Then, presumably, they'll move out and secure the area for the opening ceremony, scheduled for 5:30. Ultimately, there will be no way to stop them, because they are receiving reinforcements, while our numbers can only dissipate. We'll never have as many as we did when we first hit the wall. Our aim then becomes to slow them down as much as possible.


1
2
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SUMMIT
Saint-Jean-Baptiste
Boul. René-Lévesque E.
Grande-Allée E.
D'Aiguillon
Côte d'Abraham
St-Vallier
St-Paul
Accès
Wilfrid-Laurier
Manège Militaire
George-VI
Bataille
Parlement
Charlevoix
Rue St-Jean
St-Louis
Av. Ste-Geneviève
Av. St-Denis
Boul. Jean-Lesage
VIA Train
People's Sommet
Marché du Vieux Port
Rue Dauphine
Rue des Remparts
Côte de la Citadelle

Detail of Quebec City indicating the security perimeter (heavy line) and the approximate area of tear gas deployment (thin line, grey area). 1) The site of the CLAC/CASA action on Friday April 20th. It was at this intersection that the wall first came down. 2) Site of many of the Rue St. Jean actions. Designated as a green-zone on Friday, it became red when the fence was breached on Saturday. 3) Alternative media center. 4) Site of the GOMM action on Friday and continued confrontation during the days that followed. 5) l'Îlôt Fleuri, end point of the candle-light march from Laval, beginning of Thursday night's celebration, home of both the free kitchen and green zone actions. 6) Gathering area and starting point for Saturday's March. + = medical center. The medical center, sites 3 and 5 were all directly tear gassed by police, despite their green zone designations and distance from the perimeter. (Raphaël Thierrin and Steve Daniels)

The late afternoon turns into a kind of gradual, fighting retreat.

4:30PM

Major exchange of tear gas for smoke bombs.

The park is now under a continuous cloud of tear gas. Different affinity groups have taken positions in it, marked by flags: some red, some black, some multicolored. There's one very colorful Native American flag with the head of a Warrior in red and yellow on it, which Mac tells me is called the "Flag of Many Nations," displayed prominently in the middle of the square. People have been using it as a signal to indicate where the police are trying to advance. A moment ago, it helped rally people to drive back a line of cops by chucking bricks—the cops, Mac is careful to point out, were completely armored so it's not like any of them are likely to get seriously hurt. For the most part, the projectiles simply bounce off their shields. "Still it's pretty much impossible to maneuver, let alone begin arrests, under a continual rain of bricks, so it does, effectively, drive them back."

Tear gas is continuously being thrown back near the perimeter. Medics, who at first had been largely at the far end of the park, washing out eyes and treating asthmatics, start moving up to treat burn victims—the cops are increasingly using tear gas launchers like guns, shooting them directly at people's chests and heads. Over and over, I'm hearing cries of "Medic!" or more often, the French chant: "*Sol! Sol! Sol! Soli-dar-i-té*!" Whenever someone went down, hit by a canister or plastic bullet, people would gather and start chanting for solidarity. Other activists would come and form a human wall as medic teams ran up—usually three or four to a team, always in white, with giant red crosses all over them—to hustle the victims out of range. Medics had to run fast or the police would start firing at them.

Initial phenomenological notes on the QC actions, written shortly afterwards:

1) In a major action, there's absolutely no way to grasp even a fraction of what's going on. There are a hundred tiny dramas happening at once, later to be given narrative form by participants. At any given time, you are probably seeing tiny pieces of a dozen—someone running off in what seems a random direction, someone standing engrossed, a cluster of people doing something you can't quite make out in the distance. Major events might be happening twelve feet away—behind a wall, under an escarpment—of which you have absolutely no idea; at least, until much later, when you start to synthesize accounts.

2) Tear gas creates an utterly hostile urban landscape. That which should be designed for our convenience, parks, streets, one's own clothing potentially, becomes painful, but it also encourages the endless hugging and bonding, because everyone you do see who isn't actually firing on you is your friend.

Being gassed is a little like being set on fire; or, at least, what one imagines being set on fire might be like. Pepper spray is the same except more so.

3) Normally one can confront the cops. When one of them does something obviously unjust, you shame them: there are often literally chants of "Shame! Shame! Shame!" "The whole world is watching!" In New York, one popular chant during obvious acts of repression is "Go Fight Crime! Go Fight Crime!" None of this is possible here. Even when, as at A16, a policeman is beating you with a baton as you lie on the ground, you have some idea who is beating you. You can compare him to bullies who used to beat you up in grade school, or to police on TV. These cops are specters, ghosts, mechanical abstractions. It is utterly impossible to see them as individuals. They are only pieces on a board, and the sources of various forms of terror and pain.

4) Gas masks makes one feel a little like a machine oneself—the hugging and embracing is in part to remind you that you're not.

4:35PM

More gas—periodic calls of “Medic!”—as people are hit by canisters or plastic bullets, which are now being used more or less indiscriminately. So much for the rules of engagement announced with such fanfare before the Summit. People are running up and lobbing smoke bombs and tear gas canisters directly back at cops.

Whoops arise as one cop trips in retreat. The battle is still very much seesawing back and forth. I see someone being carried off screaming, with serious burns and blood-splattered clothes.

Craig, the huge fellow from the spokescouncil, comes clambering up toward the fence, armed with a big two-by-four he found somewhere, carrying it like a sword, looking immensely pleased with himself. He’s in what can only be described as a black battle suit, wrapped in plastic bags, with a round shield and gas mask perched on his head. About twenty seconds later, two medics run up and ask if they can use the two-by-four for splints—someone’s been incapacitated, needs to be carried away. He sighs, shrugs good naturedly, and hands it over.

4:45PM

We’re starting to take serious casualties.

Kitty, standing some thirty yards from the wall, is hit in the foot by a tear gas canister. A team of medics runs up, removes her boot, confirms that nothing’s broken. Still, it hurts like hell and she’s limping for some time afterwards. Kitty doesn’t have a gas mask, just two or three bandanas drenched in vinegar. A bit in front, Craig is struck in the ribs and doubles over in excruciating pain. Medics ask everyone in the area to form a circle around him for protection as they investigate. At first, we thought he was hit by some kind of dowel or wooden bullet, but it turns out to be yet another tear gas canister, the kind that had been fired up in the air, but in his case, was fired directly at him. Apparently he had broken a couple of ribs in exactly the same spot at A16 a year before—hence the agony. People rush up with water, trying to help. In the end it takes four people to carry him away.

5:22PM

I fall back to check up on the Refugees, who are mostly hanging back for lack of gas masks.

The big question at this point was lines of retreat. Remembering Stacey’s remarks about kill zones, it occurred to me that escape routes were going to be increasingly important. Especially since we’d promised we would try to keep the action out of St. Jean Baptiste, and no one I talked to was quite sure how we’d be able to leave if they tried to cut off René Lévesque again and we couldn’t just fall back the way we came. We all agree this is going to be increasingly important as the Summit's opening ceremony approaches. They're obviously not going to be able to hold the ceremony with a major battle going on twenty yards away and tear gas everywhere, the police are beefing up their numbers and, presumably, preparing for a big push, to get us at least within what they consider some reasonable distance. We try to find a clear space to look at maps, but the maps we have are hard to read especially because they give no indication of gradients, so we have no idea if what looks like an open space is actually a cliff.

The Barricada collective, from Boston, seems have occupied the north end of the park. There's a single masked figure, entirely in black, standing on the base of an empty fountain near some large colonial buildings that mark the north edge, looking not unlike a sable peacock as he scans the action below. I pull up my mask and ask him: "Do those streets go through behind here?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"I'm just worried we'll get cut off if they move into this side of the park."

"Why don't you check?"

I spend some time investigating. There are indeed cliffs, at some points, or at least very precipitous stretches with boulders (this was also one of the few areas still covered with dirty snow), but also stairs and several streets that look wide enough it's hard to imagine anyone closing them off. Even the cliffs look climbable. So, it looks like there won't be a problem.

Loud explosions ring out as new, even nastier tear gas is employed. There has been a persistent rumor, too, that the police were going to be bringing in attack dogs. Briefly, I actually do see one, a German shepherd on a leash, on a ledge occupied by police far off in the distance. It's the only one I see.

"Not surprising they're not using the dogs," someone remarks. "If they let a dog out in all this for more than a few minutes, it would probably strangle on the gas."

Someone else sighs philosophically. "You know I quit smoking a year ago. Now one day is probably going to do all the damage ten years of smoking probably would have."

"That's what we get for trying to fight pollution."

5:40PM, I Descend to Get Coffee on the Côte D'Abraham

Mac is heading down the hill to meet Lesley and some friends for a coffee break on the Côte d'Abraham to our north, on the edge of the Green Zone. He assures me cafes are indeed open there. Would I like to come along? I find most of the rest of the Refugees, who decide it wouldn't hurt to take a little while to clear our lungs.

In fact, the Côte d'Abraham is nothing like the shuttered expanses of René

Lévesque (which was, after all, as we'd been warned, "the street of the bourgeosie"). Here everything is open: shops, restaurants, at least a dozen streetside cafes. Protesters mill about in clumps. Some have their gas masks pulled back like medieval helmets, most have bandanas wrapped around their necks and jangling action gear of one sort or another: backpacks, goggles, water bottles, ropes and grapples, binoculars, or silly masks and street theater props taped around their backs for safekeeping. It was hard to see them as anything but a random crowd or, at best, meandering bands, but underneath, one knew there was a whole invisible architecture of organization—collectives, clusters, blocs, affinity groups. I try to envision what it would look like if somehow, all the organization could somehow be made visible: streets suddenly lighting up with a hundred colored lines, circles, diagrams.

There's a dramatic, strikingly beautiful church at the very foot of a steep cobbled street. In front of it is Lesley, talking to someone from *MacLean's*, one of the more popular Canadian magazines.

"Hey, David," she asks, "you want to talk to a reporter?"

"Uh, sure."

The woman is in her early thirties, wearing a tasseled jacket and carrying a pad. She is cheerful, enthusiastic, even perky. I feel like I'm dealing with a visitor from another world.

"David Graeber? Isn't your father or something a professor at Yale? He's an anarchist of some sort, right? I was reading about him in a recent issue of the *Montréal Gazette*."

"No, that's me, I'm a professor at Yale."

"Would you mind if I ask you some questions?"

"Um, no. I mean, yes, sure. I don't mind. Go ahead."

"Well, a recent survey showed that a majority of Canadian citizens are actually in favor of free trade. For me, that raises a lot of questions about how much you can really claim to be representing 'the public' in protests like this."

I have absolutely no idea what she's talking about: what sort of survey, how the question was framed, what responses to other questions might have been. Even thinking about it makes my brain hurt. I consider raising the issue of what the word "free trade" is supposed to mean anyway, how it's a loaded term, how even I would hesitate if someone asked me if I was against free trade. But that's more complicated than I'm really capable of expressing at that moment. Instead, I try to make a case that the fact that the government is intentionally trying to keep the contents of the treaty a secret shows that they don't believe the public would accept it if they had any idea what it actually entailed. At least, that's what I was trying to say. I walk away with the distinct impression I had just come off like a blithering idiot. It also strikes me that at least now I understand why it is that anti-globalization protesters interviewed on television almost invariably look like blithering idiots. I'm normally a pretty articulate guy. In fact, one could say that, as a professor, being able to sound intelligent—even, to provide glib responses to unexpected questions—is kind of what I do for a living. If I can't put together a coherent sentence on no sleep, coming out of two hours of chemical warfare, how on earth do they expect anyone else to?

Mac and Lesley have vanished again. The rest of us end up sipping cappuccino in a tiny restaurant in which even the waiters have bandanas still tied around their necks. The owner is handing out free bottles of water to anyone who looks like they're back from the front, and activists are continually filing in and out of the bathroom to wash out kerchiefs, eyes, and faces.

"Careful," the owner says, periodically, in French. "Remember, if you get the clothes wet, the tear gas will come out again. Remember, it's also in your hair…"

There's one question on everyone's mind. Somebody's got to ask it.

"So," I say, "what happened? How did we win? I mean—so fast. Last month at the consulta, we were all assuming that we'd have to fight our way through thousands of cops to even be able to get to the wall."

The general feeling is that we hadn't been doing the math right. "After all," Heidi reflected, "when they say there's going to be 'three thousand cops,' that doesn't mean they're all going to be on duty at the same time. Even if they're on triple overtime, only maybe half of them are going to be on duty at any given moment. Plus, they have to maintain a strategic reserve. So you have maybe one thousand cops to defend a seven kilometer perimeter, along with doing everything else they normally need cops to do."

"Whereas our forces were all concentrated on one point."

The big news on the street is that Jaggi has already been arrested—inevitably enough. Someone at the next table has all the details. Apparently, he had never gone near the wall, but turned off with the Green march. An hour ago, he was hobnobbing with some other organizers on the Côte d'Abraham when several plainclothesmen dressed as protesters nabbed him from behind. His friends—including, apparently, several women who'd been co-facilitators at the spokescouncil—tried to intervene and almost succeeded in pulling him back, whereupon they pulled out truncheons and identified themselves as police. Then they roughed him up and threw him into the back of a black SUV. It drove off and that was the last anyone had seen of him.

"Any news from the GOMM Green march?" we ask our new friends at the next table.

Someone grins. "The story I heard is they all sat down in front of the wall near the highway, flashing peace symbols. Of course, the police started gassing them, just like everybody else. Someone started up tossing the tear gas back and, before long, they'd ripped down their part of the wall, too." "They went Red?"

"Spontaneously."

"Wait a minute," says a middle-aged woman with horn-rimmed glasses at another table. "I heard about lobbing back tear gas. But I'm pretty sure they didn't attack the wall over by the highway. Anyway, I was passing by less than an hour ago and the fence was still up down there."

"I was there when it happened," says someone else. "What happened was—yeah, someone started kicking back the tear gas. But, almost as soon as they started doing it, some leader type with a megaphone showed up and announced that they'd made their point, and that the action was over, and they all retreated to the Green Zone."

6:30PM, Back to Ground Zero

By the time the Refugees head back towards the wall, all the traffic seems to be going in the other direction. Perhaps seven people are drifting downhill and away for every one moving back up. We pass the dragonfly drummers, in a little circle in the middle of the street. They're trying to rally people, but not too effectively. When we get to the top the reason becomes obvious: phalanxes of police occupy the middle of the park, and smaller squadrons are systematically taking up positions on each approach street, choking off access, then gassing like crazy everyone in sight. Lines of riot police are moving forward systematically, ten or twenty meters at a time. Eventually, they start moving down the three main north-south streets—Turnbull, Claire-Fontaine, and Sainte-Claire—that lead down the hill into St. Jean Baptiste.

It doesn't seem they are trying to do mass arrests. At least not yet. They're just trying to clear the area.

The Flag of Many Nations and a few black anarchist flags are by now at the bottom of the hill, along St. Jean, and the only possible game left was to delay the police advance. Where the Black Bloc is is anybody's guess. Same with the Red Bloc: nobody in this crowd was even thinking about throwing rocks. It had become a matter of sitting in the streets, singing songs, and waiting to be assaulted. Simple stubborn civil disobedience.

6:55PM, Avenue Turnbull

There are about ten to twenty Darth Vaders occupying the heights at the top of the street, looming out of an anxious mist of their own creation, preparing to descend on us. Gradually a group of us assemble along Lockwell Street, and decide to march up to oppose them. We wade up through the mist—partly led by me, since I'm one of the few with a gas mask—and sit down on a stretch of street, with Shawn and Lyn following behind with minidisks to make sure every sound is recorded. A young woman carrying a bullhorn asks if anyone has a copy of the "Charter of Rights and Freedoms" from the Canadian constitution (legal observers had been handing them out before the action).

"I think I have one in my bag somewhere," says Shawn. Lyn also produces a copy.

We sit on the cobblestones, about thirty or forty of us. I take off my gas mask. We are, I notice, in the middle of a purely residential neighborhood. The woman with the bullhorn, wearing a suede jacket and no sort of gear whatsoever, unfolds the paper and begins a dramatic recitation of the section concerning freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. An IMC radio journalist holds out her microphone right next to the woman, kneeling, one arm dramatically upraised. Behind us, I notice a couple of video cameras focused on the police.

We knew, of course, they'd gas us.

Only twenty or third yards from the police position, for the first time, in fact, we could actually look into their eyes and see their faces. Most of them weren't wearing gas masks—probably because they knew they'd be firing at a distance, and downhill. We all stared transfixed as one woman cop, with a simple inoffensive face and blonde hair pulled back severely behind her visor, pulled out her launcher and began to take aim.

People started calling out to her: "Don't do it! Please! Don't gas us!"

"This is a nonviolent assembly!"

"We're not your enemies. Please, don't shoot!"

Then she fired. The canister sailed a few inches past the upheld microphone and exploded directly behind us.

Within a matter of seconds, it was a barrage. Eight, nine, ten cans were spinning all around us, exploding in flames, scattering everywhere. We scattered too. The young woman with the megaphone started walking slowly, defiantly backwards—then, turned over her shoulder and picked up the bullhorn one last time. "I just want to point out that you just broke the law!"

Another tear gas can landed about a foot away from her, then spun, flames shooting out of it. Another smacked into someone's window right above us, where for all we know some family had just been sitting down to dinner. The entire area turned into a cloud of CS.

That was, as Shawn pointed out, the first use of tear gas we'd seen in an obviously residential neighborhood.

Before long, we're back on the Côte, where the Flag of Many Nations waves. Someone tells us that, while on Turnbull the police were distracting themselves by gassing pacifists and local residents, on a nearby side street—Burton, or maybe

Claire-Fontaine—a couple Black Bloc affinity groups had moved up, thinking to do some kind of flanking maneuver, and discovered three empty black SUVs completely unguarded. These were the vehicles used by snatch squads, quite possibly the very ones earlier used to nab Jaggi. They smashed the windows and made away with scores of plastic shields and other supplies, including several documents on cop formation tactics.

Shawn and Lyn, still sputtering from the gas, head off to find their car, which they think they left somewhere in walking distance the night before. We're all going to be meeting in an hour or two anyway, back in Laval.

7:27PM, Along St. Jean

By this time there's a strong feeling that things are winding down. We hear the opening ceremony has been delayed until 10PM (this turns out to be untrue: it actually began ten minutes later, at 7:30, but nonetheless hours behind schedule).

Another gas attack: this one quite close to us. Flaming canisters come spinning all the way down to where we are gathered on St. Jean, on a little intersection near a deserted lot. People come streaming down the same street. Some of the Refugees go out and spread our arms to prevent a stampede, but there's no use trying to hold the position. One young man with a red flag tries advancing, nearly alone. Before long, he has to retreat again. Another guy with a Québec Soviet flag (!)—half fleur de lis, half hammer and sickle—plants it next to the Flag of Many Nations. Some CLAC fellow with a megaphone is trying to rally everyone in the vicinity in French. A small group drags a dumpster to the middle of the intersection and sets a fire in it. It's a flat space and well ventilated, just above another steep slope; seems as good a place as any to try to make a stand. I notice, too, that several of the people milling around the dumpster do not look like activists, but appear to be local residents, pissed off about the tear gas. And they definitely don't seem to be blaming us. One of the CLAC people is explaining to them that a fire will burn away the residual tear gas.

After a while, another CLAC person—a tall fellow with long, brown, shaggy hair—turns to me. He remembers me from the consulta.

"We are going to Laval: there is a spokescouncil," he says. "Would you like to come?"

"Oh, yeah. Actually that's where I'm supposed to meet the rest of my affinity group in a few minutes. How are you getting there?"

"There's a bus."

I head off with the CLAC team, one man and two women, but before we get there, they decide to stop first for a beer. Would I like to come along? I consider it, it occurs to me that I'm completely exhausted. So they direct me to the bus stop, and after a pleasant chat with a friendly *LA Times* reporter in the next seat, I arrive in Laval.

8:07PM, Stupid Little Spokes

The room, which has every sort of banner draped all over the walls, contains maybe two hundred people, but only half, at best, are taking part in the meeting. I soon see why. The conversation has degenerated into yet another argument about diversity of tactics. There are people complaining bitterly about rock-throwing, others insisting it was the only way to deal with indiscriminate attacks by the police. Nobody seems to be listening to anybody else, or talking about plans for the next day (or maybe that's later? I don't see an agenda on the wall). The whole spokescouncil just seems to be a chance for people to sound off.

Most of the Refugees are already in the room, or nearby, lounging about, playing with their minidisks, and watching images of the action from other peoples' video cameras. I check in and we all agree to head back to the house in an hour and a half.

It was at this moment I also discover that I am no longer the only member of NYC Ya Basta! in Québec City. Laura, the Italian woman and CUNY grad student, had just arrived with a carload of Yabbas—that is, Yabbas of the genuine, Italian variety: Beppe, Sandra, and Roberto. Laura starts laughing the moment she sees me. She runs up to give me a prolonged embrace. "Ha! This is so perfect! So wonderful! All the big pragmatic men of action in Ya Basta!—not a single one got through. They all gave up. And who actually makes it into action? Just you and me. The two intellectuals!"

Her friends are dressed to the nines in gorgeous Italian suits. "It was the only way we could get through," Roberto explains to me cheerfully.

"Yes," Laura said. "When we tried to drive through customs, the man asked where we were going. We said Québec City. Then he asked the purpose of our trip and Beppe said "tourism." So he started going through Beppe's passport, looking at the stamps. 'Hmmm…Geneva, June 1999; Seattle, November 1999; Prague, September 2000. So you just happened to show up at every major protest at a globalization summit for the last three years? I don't think so.'"

"So, what did you do?"

"They all just started screaming at him: 'WE ARE ITALIAN CITIZENS TRYING TO VISIT CANADA! HOW DARE YOU? WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? I WILL NOT STAND TO BE TREATED LIKE THIS! WHO IS YOUR COMMANDING OFFICER? WHAT IS YOUR BADGE NUMBER? WE'RE GOING TO CALL THE ITALIAN CONSULATE AND LODGE AN OFFICIAL COMPLAINT! WE'RE GOING TO MAKE THIS AN INTERNATIONAL FUCKING INCIDENT!' And, finally, he just backed down."

"You mean that actually worked?"

"The suits helped."

The one thing that really worries me is that no one has heard anything from Karen. I was pretty sure we'd explained to her the importance of making sure other members of your affinity group know your whereabouts—or at least of getting word to them before you simply leave town. Anyway, it seemed like basic common sense. I find a place to check my email. Nothing. My cell phone is dead, all my numbers thus inaccessible (for instance, Sasha's), but I borrow a phone from which I can check my messages. Nothing. The obvious implication is that she's been arrested, which is both possible (I am told they have been targeting independent journalists) and disturbing (since she has no idea what she's doing). I'm trying to remember: did we even make sure she wrote the legal number on her arm? Yes. We did that at the IMC. I borrow the cell phone again and call Legal. All I get are busy signals. I call the IMC. No information.

Finally, I give up. The Italians have a car, and invite me to join them on a brief spin to scout out the action. We end up taking a tour of the Upper City, passing down René Lévesque and the Fields of Abraham, watching occasional night battles—at one point I was pretty sure I saw someone throw a molotov, off in the distance. Somehow, after about ten minutes, all of us were singing:

Riot riot – I wanna riot
Riot riot – a riot of my own
Riot riot – I wanna riot
Riot riot – a riot of my own

(We had all, without noticing, dropped the "white" part.) I think I actually started it. Which is uncharacteristic, since I can't sing a note. Not that it matters much with the Clash.

"Ah," sighs Roberto, whose English is not fluent. "Even when we can hardly speak to each other, we all know the same songs."

Saturday, April 21, 2001

We arrived at the house around midnight, only to discover Janna, of all people, already there. It turns out she's a friend of Lyn's.

One result of Janna's medical ordeal is that she had become something of an expert on the effects of "non-lethal" chemical weapons. Clothing, she explained to us, absorbs toxins. It's important to wash out everything we're wearing very carefully before we take a shower or else the next time we get wet, it'll be just as bad as when we were gassed the first time. My clothes were clearly saturated with all sorts of toxins. On the other hand, I had no bags and, therefore, nothing to change into. I ended up wandering around the house naked at 2AM while everyone else was asleep, doing laundry in a machine in the half-finished basement. My sweaters weren't washable, but, fortunately, most of them could be left behind since, according to all reports, Sunday was going to be even warmer than the day before.

Then I caught a good six or seven hours sleep—a rare luxury for a day of action.

For breakfast the next morning, Heidi had fetched croissants, *pain au chocolate*, and a copy of every local paper available. She'd also found several foreign ones. We passed them around while watching TV newscasters endlessly replay the high points of Friday's marches and confrontations. The coverage was amazing for its detail. There were the sort of headlines American media activists dream about, the kind you would never see in the US in a million years: "THE WALL FALLS!" "THE TEARS OF DEMOCRACY," (the latter referring to people's reactions to the tear gas), and so on.

Information available to us was a confusing mix of rumors, news reports, rumors reported in news reports, and official police statements—pretty much all of which could be assumed to be substantially untrue. At the bakery, Heidi had heard that a group of eighty nuns, enraged by the gas, was preparing to march on the main checkpoint to rip down the wall. The TV was reporting only fifty arrests on Friday, but Ben and Lyn, who had been on the phone with someone at the IMC, heard much higher numbers: including 126 in a sweep just a few hours before (both numbers turned out to be wildly inaccurate). The police had thrown a press conference Friday evening, announcing that a special operation had nabbed "the leader of the Black Bloc"—obviously meaning Jaggi. Jaggi's current whereabouts were unknown. (Only several days later did police acknowledge holding him; he was officially charged with "illegal possession of a catapult.")

Even the American press was far better than usual:

> **Protesters Seize Day in Québec**
> **Trade Foes Tear Gassed at Summit of Americas**
>
> By Dana Milbank
> *Washington Post* Staff Writer
> Saturday, April 21, 2001; Page A01
>
> QUÉBEC CITY, April 20—President Bush and 33 other Western Hemisphere leaders seeking to build the world's largest free-trade zone opened a summit meeting today as clouds of tear gas and violent demonstrations played havoc

> with schedules and delayed meetings.
>
> Bush remained holed up in his hotel as the summit's opening ceremonies were delayed more than an hour. He was forced to cancel one meeting and postpone or abbreviate others because the movements of heads of state around Québec City were hampered by the anti-globalization protests.
>
> "If they are protesting because of free trade, I'd say I disagree," Bush said. "I think trade is very important to this hemisphere. Trade not only helps spread prosperity but trade helps spread freedom."
>
> In the lobby of the Loews Hotel, confusion reigned, as Bush aides scrambled to keep track of the changing schedule while watching the riots on television. Colombian President Andres Pastrana waited out the delays in the cocktail lounge…

There were rumors of huge numbers already assembling: twenty-five thousand at the Vieux Port, at the very foot of the city, to begin the labor march and People's Summit; a student group massing on the Plains of Abraham; huge numbers at Laval. Everyone, including the newspapers, were going on about the sheer size of the event: there's simply no way the police can handle this. The big wild card, we agree, will be the labor march. The organizers, predictably, have set it up so that everyone starts ten or fifteen blocks from the perimeter and then marches off in the other direction, to end up in a rally in some distant lot. The question is whether rank and file will be satisfied by this. We know that both CLAC and NEFAC (Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists, a labor-oriented anarchist group) will have people there, trying to divert people to the wall.

Comparing notes, we also try to piece together more of a picture of what must have happened yesterday. Akwesasne we decide we'll never figure out, not until we have more information. Obviously, something fucked up in a big way. Shawn wants to know: why the hell were you guys four hours late? Half the Warriors had left already. I honestly can't tell him. And what was this idiocy of "all or nothing"? The irony about Friday was that, while we were all at Akwesasne eating fish, CLAC people at the spokescouncil were in a near panic that the Carnival Against Capitalism would be a bust. The torchlight parade and women's action were beautiful, but relatively small. No one had any idea how many people would show up Saturday. That's why there had been so much jubilation about numbers Saturday morning.

Janna comes in late, sniffling, in a nightgown—she, at least, got through with all her baggage. She says she'd spent most of Friday in the Green Zone, whose center was below the highway at the foot of the hill, and had caught a glimpse of the Living River.

"Oh, right, the Blue Bloc! I was wondering if those guys even got through."

"They were there all right, a couple hundred of them, actually. I saw them on St. Jean, not long after we heard the wall came down. They had this whole complex organization with four flags each representing one of the four elements—green for earth, blue for water, red for fire and… was it white for air? No, I think it was yellow. Starhawk was there with a little drum and they put on a spiral dance and called on the power of the river to put the elements on our side."

Sam is looking dubious, as if trying not to mutter something cynical into his coffee.

"Well," I remark, "for what it's worth, we did have remarkably good weather yesterday."

"Yeah, the breeze was at our backs the whole time," said Lyn. "You saw how it kept blowing all the tear gas back on the police? Especially at first, when they were firing right in front of them, it all just streamed right back into their faces."

"The earth is on our side," said Janna. "I really believe that."

"Maybe we should make a sign to carry to the park," I say: "'We Know Which Way the Wind Is Blowing.'"

11:00AM, Orsainville

Still worried about Karen, I end up wasting the rest of the morning and early afternoon on some scheme planned by Heidi and her friend, a *Frontline* producer named Claudia, to visit the local prison, in a forest some miles out of town. Claudia has a car. There are already a handful of activists doing jail solidarity in front on the prison, but they have only a limited list of who's inside, and no one has heard word of any IMC or other freelance videographers being held there.

Later, that handful is to expand to a veritable "Solidarity Village," as people pitch tents, bring in jugglers and musicians, and create a continual rhythm of chants and music to ensure the prisoners know they're out there. A squad of riot cops will appear, and entertainers with megaphones will tell jokes and try to crack them up. There will be vegetarian cookouts and an endless supply of journalists. Not now. Only about twenty people who have reason to believe members of their affinity groups or close relatives are behind bars, a couple legal reps, and one rather pathetic middle-aged couple worried sick about their sixteen-year-old daughter.

Everything takes longer than it ought to. Finally, after a marathon cell phone session, Claudia says she wants to catch the tail end of the People's Summit—which the organizers had intentionally placed far, far from the action, near the port several kilometers away. The parade was supposed to set out at noon, marching to the summit; we've definitely missed that. Anyway, I'm reluctant to head that far from the city without knowing how I'm going to get back. She offers to drop us both off at the IMC, where Heidi has to do a radio show. We agree to meet with the rest of our group at the party under the highway in the Green Zone that evening, and I head up toward the park to see if I can find La Resistance.

3:20PM, Finally Back in the City

There's graffiti everywhere: a thousand Circle-As, "FUCK THE COPS," "NO CHOICE," "*MURS BLANCS, PEUPLE MUET,*" gas masks painted onto the faces of every half-dressed model on a bus-stop advertisement, not a billboard anywhere left unaltered or undefaced. By the side of the highway, at various spots:

> *QUI EST LE CHEF DU BLACK BLOC?*
> THE GATES OF HEAVEN WILL BE TAKEN BY STORM
> *Y'EN A PAS EPAIS*
> PROPERTY IS THEFT

At the café, it's still all activists. Within five minutes, I have most of the story of the day. The parade was enormous: the news is saying sixty-thousand people, with an endless display of puppets, banners, floats, and theatrical performances. It ended in a rally with speeches by Jose Bové, Maude Barlow, and all sorts of international celebrities. "Did anyone break off to go to the wall?" Well, not in the thousands, no, but there have been a lot of trade unionists who at least have visited the perimeter. One column of several hundred auto workers formed affinity groups and marched up to a gate somewhere way on the east side of the perimeter, and ended up getting seriously gassed. Many are still there, thinks the fellow at the next table. At any rate, things will really get interesting, he thinks, when the rally breaks up, because a lot of the participants are saying they're going to go to the party underneath the highway.

"That's the Green Zone, right? The Ile Flueriot?" I ask, looking at my map.

"Yes, there. Boulevard Charest Est. You see, there's this huge intersection of six different roads? It's not far from the IMC." A few minutes later, I've resumed my climb towards the Old City. The cops have been gassing all day. There is, literally, a thick cloud of the stuff, hanging like a noxious wall over St. Jean Baptiste, and extending well below it. One thing is a pleasant change, though: by now the loyalties of the surrounding community have become utterly explicit. It was as if, Friday, they were still observing, measuring, waiting to see whether the anarchists would really trash the city, as the federal authorities had been promising them, whether the cops would really gas them, as the anarchists had said they would. By now, they knew. We had hurt no one and damaged nothing. We had done our best to avoid making a battlefield of their neighborhoods. The police had responded by gassing and attacking everyone indiscriminately, firing toxins directly into their patios and gardens.

By Saturday afternoon, half the houses are hanging out some sort of banner or sign: "We are with you!," "No FTAA!," or even, once, "We support the Black Bloc" (except, of course, in French). Many have also brought garden hoses out to their stoops or are dangling them from windows to provide free water for protesters. Grandmas wave and smile from porches. Children giggle and follow us around. It's like some crazy anarchist fantasy. The one exception, as I pass, is a stocky, middle-aged man who is throwing some kind of tantrum at a handful of Black Bloc kids in front of his building, right at the end of the steep street leading to the park. "Why are you still here?" he's shouting, "I understand yesterday, you tore down the wall, you made your statement. That's good, I support you. But enough now! Still you have to fight the cops, still they're gassing, my home is full of tear gas, for two days it has been full of gas, I've had to send my infant son away to an aunt in the suburbs because he was choking on it. My mother has had to abandon her apartment. Enough! Right now there is a labor march in the Lower City, it says on TV there are 60,000 people marching. Why aren't you marching with them? Why are you still here bringing the gas on us?" The Black Bloc kids seem flustered; they appear to know enough French to understand him, but not enough to make any kind of articulate reply. Finally, three or four neighbors gather and try to calm him down. "It's not their fault, they just want to make sure the heads of state hear their message." "You can't expect them all to march away from where the delegates are actually meeting." "It's not the kids who are gassing us," one woman insists, "it's the police."

3:35PM, Ground Zero

The park is ours again, with scattered collections of people in the square sitting on the ground, putting on performances. Gas explosions are periodic, but nowhere near the same intensity as the day before (they're landing approximately once every three minutes now, says someone with a pocket watch).

The Black Bloc is not in evidence. I'm told they've been scattered in small groups for most of the day, going against exposed sectors of the perimeter. I'm disappointed, though, to see that the section of the wall we'd pulled down yesterday was up again. There's a new, somewhat jerry-built gate. Right behind it, they've positioned a water cannon—actually a pretty clever move, since this means we can't get near enough to trash the thing. The water cannon seems to be set to autopilot, shooting an huge plume of water which slowly swept back and forth across an arc of space in front of it. It is as if they had found a lawn sprinkler that worked at a thousand times the pressure and volume. As a defensive weapon, it was quite effective. A coordinated assault on that section of wall would now clearly be impossible. On the other hand, the presence of plumes of water—no matter how high intensity—on a hot day is apparently just too much of a temptation in the middle of an anti-capitalist carnival. People keep dashing up and making a spectacle of themselves splashing about in the water. Some get knocked off their feet and slide about merrily. Others lean into it and stay up—looking like street mimes walking against the wind—or otherwise clown around. Everyone seems to be enjoying the show; anyway, the cops don't seem to be firing at anyone. Despite repeated warnings about getting my toxin-drenched clothing wet, I can't help myself.

I take a brief dip. It's kind of refreshing.

Back in the park, people are playing Frisbee, bouncing beachballs. Half the time I have my mask pulled up on top of my head.

Old friends are everywhere. At one point Janna appears, entirely wrapped in an elaborate protective outfit made of plastic garbage bags, goggles, poncho, and high plastic boots, carrying a large bag of medical materials for the treatment of the effects of tear gas. She sets up shop by a tree at the very edge of a huge toxic cloud.

"Jesus, Janna! What are you *doing* here?" asks one of her fellow Refugees.

"I just couldn't sit back and do nothing while people are being gassed."

"Are you crazy? I've heard they're using CS again. Who knows what would happen if you were exposed again!"

"CS? Is that really true?" Several bystanders confirm the rumor. The matter becomes a spontaneous group discussion. Eventually, Janna agrees to move back down to St. Jean and set up shop there instead. Two of the bystanders accompany her.

Eventually, I notice scattered clusters of Black Bloc anarchists coalescing on the far edge of the park. Looks like some kind of pre-arranged convergence. At that moment, I had been talking with some friends about the feasibility of a flanking maneuver of our own against the southern portion of the wall, which seemed undefended. Scouting out the territory, I run into Dean, who had been lying on a long flat rock in a rather dashing trenchcoat. I explain my project.

"Count me in," he smiles, producing an enormous pair of wire clippers from under his coat.

But the spot turns out to be better defended than it appeared. Tear gas canisters land directly at our feet, and five robocops appear with what look like giant shotguns, either for the firing of plastic bullets or pepper-soaked beanbags. We don't really want to find out, and quickly back away.

By this time, though, the Bloc, still only about forty people, is masking up would. By now, they knew. We had hurt no one and damaged nothing. We had done our best to avoid making a battlefield of their neighborhoods. The police had responded by gassing and attacking everyone indiscriminately, firing toxins directly into their patios and gardens.

By Saturday afternoon, half the houses are hanging out some sort of banner or sign: "We are with you!," "No FTAA!," or even, once, "We support the Black Bloc" (except, of course, in French). Many have also brought garden hoses out to their stoops or are dangling them from windows to provide free water for protesters. Grandmas wave and smile from porches. Children giggle and follow us around. It's like some crazy anarchist fantasy. The one exception, as I pass, is a stocky, middle-aged man who is throwing some kind of tantrum at a handful of Black Bloc kids in front of his building, right at the end of the steep street leading to the park. "Why are you still here?" he's shouting, "I understand yesterday, you tore down the wall, you made your statement. That's good, I support you. But enough now! Still you have to fight the cops, still they're gassing, my home is full of tear gas, for two days it has been full of gas, I've had to send my infant son away to an aunt in the suburbs because he was choking on it. My mother has had to abandon her apartment. Enough! Right now there is a labor march in the Lower City, it says on TV there are 60,000 people marching. Why aren't you marching with them? Why are you still here bringing the gas on us?" The Black Bloc kids seem flustered; they appear to know enough French to understand him, but not enough to make any kind of articulate reply. Finally, three or four neighbors gather and try to calm him down. "It's not their fault, they just want to make sure the heads of state hear their message." "You can't expect them all to march away from where the delegates are actually meeting." "It's not the kids who are gassing us," one woman insists, "it's the police."

3:35PM, Ground Zero

The park is ours again, with scattered collections of people in the square sitting on the ground, putting on performances. Gas explosions are periodic, but nowhere near the same intensity as the day before (they're landing approximately once every three minutes now, says someone with a pocket watch).

The Black Bloc is not in evidence. I'm told they've been scattered in small groups for most of the day, going against exposed sectors of the perimeter. I'm disappointed, though, to see that the section of the wall we'd pulled down yesterday was up again. There's a new, somewhat jerry-built gate. Right behind it, they've positioned a water cannon—actually a pretty clever move, since this means we can't get near enough to trash the thing. The water cannon seems to be set to autopilot, shooting an huge plume of water which slowly swept back and forth across an arc of space in front of it. It is as if they had found a lawn sprinkler that worked at a thousand times the pressure and volume. As a defensive weapon, it was quite effective. A coordinated assault on that section of wall would now clearly be impossible. On the other hand, the presence of plumes of water—no matter how high intensity—on a hot day is apparently just too much of a temptation in the middle of an anti-capitalist carnival. People keep dashing up and making a spectacle of themselves splashing about in the water. Some get knocked off their feet and slide about merrily. Others lean into it and stay up—looking like street mimes walking against the wind—or otherwise clown around. Everyone seems to be enjoying the show; anyway, the cops don't seem to be firing at anyone. Despite repeated warnings about getting my toxin-drenched clothing wet, I can't help myself.

I take a brief dip. It's kind of refreshing.

Back in the park, people are playing Frisbee, bouncing beachballs. Half the time I have my mask pulled up on top of my head.

Old friends are everywhere. At one point Janna appears, entirely wrapped in an elaborate protective outfit made of plastic garbage bags, goggles, poncho, and high plastic boots, carrying a large bag of medical materials for the treatment of the effects of tear gas. She sets up shop by a tree at the very edge of a huge toxic cloud.

"Jesus, Janna! What are you *doing* here?" asks one of her fellow Refugees.

"I just couldn't sit back and do nothing while people are being gassed."

"Are you crazy? I've heard they're using CS again. Who knows what would happen if you were exposed again!"

"CS? Is that really true?" Several bystanders confirm the rumor. The matter becomes a spontaneous group discussion. Eventually, Janna agrees to move back down to St. Jean and set up shop there instead. Two of the bystanders accompany her.

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By this time, though, the Bloc, still only about forty people, is masking up and about to move out. La Resistance is not among them, but I do spot two friends from yesterday, who suggest I come along. We can always do lookout, they say. Anyway, apparently, there's a plan. I zip up my hoodie, rendering myself entirely dressed in black, mask myself, and follow.

4:00PM, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce

What follows is one of only three major instances of targeted property destruction during the Summit. The target is the local headquarters of one of Canada's major banks, the CIBC—one of the main forces lobbying for passage of the FTAA, along with profiting from government student loan programs while pushing for massive cuts in health and education funding.

The bank offices are only a couple blocks from the park, on the edge of a residential neighborhood. There's some kind of confrontation between pacifists and a line of riot cops a couple blocks away, but I can't really make out what's going on there. We find the bank itself, on the first floor of some minor office building, already under siege. However, matters are also a bit more complicated than we anticipated. Two members of the affinity group that planned the action have picked up a police barricade and are preparing to smash in the bank's plate-glass windows. Standing in their way, though, are two fiftyish hippies, apparently a married couple in identical rainbow jackets and tie-dyed clothes. The two are methodically trying to interpose themselves. Eventually, the woman gives up but her husband is persistent. Spry, dancer-like, he keeps leaping in front of their trajectory every time they pull back to swing. The two kids with the barricade are determined not to hurt him, but neither are they about to give up. There follows a peculiar ballet of feints and thrusts, until the Black Bloc kids figure out a system: one bluffs him, and the other swings hard in a different direction. Before long there's shattered glass all over the sidewalk.

We're scouting for cameras or police, and seeing neither. There are a couple of bystanders who are probably reporters, but they're only carrying notebooks; the police line two blocks away seems oblivious, or maybe they just haven't received orders yet to move. What there are is extremely disruptive pacifists, who seem to have gone through some SalAMI "de-escalation training" and are trying out all their techniques. As we walk along the edge of the scene, one bearded pacifist, looking rather like the lumberjack fellow from the Spokescouncil (but no, it's not him) is following us along repeating over and over again, in exactly the same words: "These are not the right tactics to use. These are not the right tactics to use. These are not the right tactics to use."

I'm considering asking him if he considers this a form of argument. My companions tell me just leave him be. Which seems wise.

A little further off, things look they might be about to descend into shoving matches or actual scuffles.

It's time for some de-escalation of our own. The Bloc march off, led by a tall blonde guy singing "Kumbaya."

Except for one small team, one of whom stays behind to spray-paint:

> Banks don't bleed. Protesters have.

Another pastes up a cardboard sign prepared for the occasion:

> I Owe You One for the Broken Window
> —The Revolution

And a third splashes the interior with a bucket of white paint.

We march west, away from the park, but before we've gone more than a block or two, we are met by a delegation of middle-aged townsfolk (I think to myself, "I am tempted to call them 'burghers,' except that none of them are fat"). They ask us not to go into their neighborhood. It is residential.

One of the anarchists in front is trying to explain that they have nothing to fear from us: we never attack small businesses or personal property. Only corporate establishments.

"Well, there are none of those in this direction. Just people's homes. So there's no need to go here."

After a bit of uncomfortable shifting back and forth, the man next to him is more direct: "Don't destroy the town," he says, pointing back to the park. "Go fight the cops!"

"Yes, fight the cops," says someone else. "We realize you are fighting on our side. We support you. But people are afraid for their neighborhoods."

For many of the Black Bloc, this must be a moment of ultimate moral confusion. After all, most anarchists believe targeted property destruction is legitimate *because* it's not really a form of violence. You can't be violent to an inanimate object. Because nobody actually gets hurt. This is why the rainbow fellow could act the way he did: he knew none of us would be willing to harm another human being—or anyway, certainly not one that wasn't directly attacking us, whereas if he had tried to interpose his body like that against a cop, the cop would simply hit him. Suddenly we were faced with members of the public urging us to forgo property destruction, and instead engage in violence. With the pacifists, we could argue, even scream at each other, but we were screaming in the same language. Here we were dealing with a completely different moral universe.

After brief exchange, we turn around and march back towards the park, to the usual loud cheers and applause. Someone shouts: "It's the People's Riot Police!"

4:20PM, Jean Baptiste

The park is all celebration: "We won! Summit closed for tear gas!"

Not true, of course.

After a bit I finally find La Resistance, to a general exchange of hugs. I tell Kitty about the bank. She tells me that all day there have been running battles along the north side of the wall, where it cuts through Jean Baptiste. Police lines are so thinly stretched, it's usually possible to find a spot that's undefended. Mostly they've been using hooks and ropes and clippers like on Friday, but sometimes you can take advantage of abrupt slopes to roll flaming dumpsters or even just shopping carts into the fence.

The Refugees are nowhere to be seen, so I figure I'm La Resistance for the rest of the afternoon. Before long, we end up on the edge of an ancient church graveyard, where the fence has been particularly heavily festooned with signs and slogans, yanking away with grappling hooks, using paving stones to mash away at the main posts, or to chuck over the fence at police vehicles or even, on one or two occasions, individual police. Much of the wall is already down in this area. Every trash bin seems to have a fire in it—to burn away the tear gas—which means as we march we find ourselves moving through alternating streams of smoke, toxic white, and acrid grey.

Kitty explains they've been paying particular attention to the churchyard because it's directly behind the Congress Center where the Summit is taking place.

Notebook Entry, written the next day, 4/22/01

The Black Bloc was never large that day, rarely more than thirty or forty people, actually, though it would occasionally reconverge at fifty or sixty. People would get scattered, affinity groups of normally six or eight get reduced to two or three people, due to injuries or exhaustion. Though, occasionally, we'd also get reinforcements from people who just arrived in town: like the three Connecticut Yabbas who showed up Saturday morning and joined La Resistance. Just about everyone had been hit by something at some point—often feet or ankles, mostly by tear gas canisters. But plastic bullets were being used increasingly, and from guns with laser sights so at night people could often see that the cops were intentionally aiming for heads or groins. "I got hit in the groin. But I was wearing a cup!" declared one of our new arrivals, triumphantly.

When a scout spotted a plausible target, we'd gather everyone available and form a circle to discuss it. This always involved first getting a couple volunteers to do a camera-check, circling through the surrounding crowds, since there always was one, asking anyone with video cameras or photographic equipment not to take pictures of the meeting. This despite everyone being masked all the time anyway. (Brad told me it was just the same in Prague. The trick is to approach looking vaguely scary, all in black, masked and usually helmeted; and then be scrupulously polite and gracious when you actually open your mouth. The combination proved remarkably effective.) Discussion was pretty free-form, but consensus-based. Then we'd move into action—often greeted by cheers by demonstrators and increasingly, townspeople, whenever we show up in a new place.

The Bloc had only minimal communications—at one point I think our entire comms system consisted of two guys connected via Nextel, whose job was to coordinate so as to make sure we didn't get cut off and surrounded by cops. When we charged—as on St. Jean—one person also hung back to scout. But that was it. This seemed typical of the whole action, though: if CLAC had a comms or scouting system, which presumably they must have, I never saw a sign of it. It must have been very small. Time's Up Bill, who spent some time circling the perimeter on a bicycle, later complained that he'd seen numerous unguarded breaches in the security fence all day. If there had been any sort of proper organization, people would have been able to burst right in. But of course most of us had long since decided we didn't want to invade the perimeter.

In part, too, the attacks on the wall are meant to keep the police off balance, to try to keep them from amassing forces and invading the surrounding neighborhood again.

Not far away from the cemetery, at Rue St. Genevieve, was a huge press of people, a kind of focus of intensity, where the Bloc had earlier been attacking a section of the wall. Apparently, they'd set fire to a dumpster, and rolled it into the fence. It crashed through and flipped over inside the perimeter. Cops then tried to block the breach with a bulldozer, but the Bloc had managed to disable it—by the time we saw it, it looked thoroughly trashed, with revolutionary slogans spray-painted all over it—and escaped just as a squad of maybe thirty riot cops marched up in formation to secure the area. When we arrived, the dumpster was still smoldering, the tractor broken and askew, and the thirty police standing absolutely motionless, surrounded by hundreds of pacifists. The alley was tight enough they had managed to completely cut them off. The police had maybe a couple yards clear in front of and behind them, after that, it was an impenetrable wall of human beings. Someone told us the standoff had now been going on for almost an hour. There was a sizeable band of drummers and other musicians a little bit up the slope, playing slow rhythmic music—actually, it was extremely good, with all sorts of intricate syncopation—and people dancing in hypnotic style. Occasionally someone would leave the human wall and join the dancing, or vice versa. Entranced, I fell away from the Bloc for a moment, promising I'd rendezvous later.

5:25PM, The Park

Now the story is the Summit is delayed because the tear gas has gotten in the ventilation system. Or, alternately, that the Brazilian delegation have used this as an excuse to refuse to go in. (Everybody has been counting on the Brazilians to spearhead opposition to the treaty.)

The police are starting to move down into Jean Baptiste, despite our best efforts to delay them. One unit has encircled a nearby intersection.

They're also trying to take the park again, making liberal use of concussion grenades and pepper spray. The response is an almost dizzying diversity of tactics. There's a cluster of about thirty activists, mostly students I think, in jeans and T-shirts, some without even bandanas, staging a sit-down. They position themselves right in the path of a police line, those in front raising both arms in the air to flash peace signs. They're chanting:

> We're nonviolent, how 'bout you?
> We're nonviolent, how 'bout you?

As the cops get nearer, the activists break into "the whole world is watching!" and two police officers start firing plastic bullets directly into the middle of the crowd. Someone screams. Someone carries someone off, but the rest hold their position. A priest appears and interposes himself. He's talking with the police. Some Radical Cheerleaders, with black and red pompoms and outrageous hairdos, walk up and begin one of their elaborate chants nearby. Apparently reassured, the cops return to the fence.

Almost immediately thereafter, four molotov cocktails sail over the fence after them. I see a few figures running off in the mist. Oddly, they don't look much like activists: the two I see most clearly seem stocky, fortyish. One rather reminds me of the fellow who'd been complaining about the tear gas on his stoop a few hours before (but I'm pretty sure it isn't him).

I never saw anyone with a firebomb that weekend who wasn't speaking French.

Finally, the pieces started to fall together: Montréal Ya Basta! explaining about how there are different standards about violence in Québec, CASA's confusing refusal to disallow molotovs, even as they appealed for community support, the delegation of citizens telling us to fight the cops—even Mac's diatribe in Little Italy about how the truly oppressed either sit back or fight back, and are not interested in elaborate codes of nonviolence. This is a community with an extremely militant tradition of resistance. Both the priest and the bombers actually represented the same phenomenon: a community beginning to actively intervene on our behalf.

A bearded guy on stilts, in an elaborate green-sequined costume, strides up to the fence with an enormous peace sign. The cops turn on the water cannon and blast him square in the chest. He flies backwards about twenty feet. Medics run up, make sure his spine isn't broken, then turn the stilts into splints and quickly, keeping their heads low, whisk him away.

5:53PM

A huge plume rises over the park. Helicopters rattle overhead.

Another mortar round. Cheers as someone throws it back. Two smokebombs go with it.

"Hey, nonviolent!" someone shouts.

Someone else: "Is there anyone who might be pregnant? They're using CS gas!"

A police squad starts nabbing activists at the edge of the park. It's perhaps the first time I've actually witnessed an arrest. I leave the park and head downhill again.

6:00PM, Jean Baptiste

What follows is something of a blur. I completely gave up on taking notes. I somehow wind up with a column of about twenty-five or thirty Black Bloc'ers who attempt a charge on a fenced position… I think it was along St. Jean again, where a flaming shopping cart had almost collapsed the wall an hour or two before. About halfway through the charge, we're pepper-bombed; at least, it's the same blinding sensation I had experienced at the wall, going right through my gas mask. I stumble back a ways. By chance, there's a medic on a nearby stoop, a young man of eighteen or twenty who looks like he's from Senegal or Cameroon, with spiked hair and a hefty plastic first aid kit. He offers me the full anti-pepper treatment, and we find a sheltered space where he carefully washes my eyes and face with some kind of antacid solution, then scrubs and washes it out with mineral oil. I feel considerably better.

By the time I find the remnants of the Bloc, though, there are only a little over a dozen of them, and a big blonde fellow remarks sternly that no one recognizes me. Where's my affinity group? Maybe you should go try to find them. I look around for Kitty and the rest of La Resistance, but no one is around. I could have sworn I was with them earlier. Still a little dazed, I can't remember anyone's names, let alone action names. Buffy is a ways off resting against a wall with her eyes closed. I've forgotten her name too. I tell him, good idea, yeah, I'm sure they must have moved down to the park or something, and head off to take myself a breather.

Big blonde guy suddenly takes on a kindly tone. "Hey, good luck! I'm sure it won't take long to find them."

At the park, things are getting ever more intense. A small squad of people with fire bombs are trying to destroy the water cannon. Every time they get close to being in range, carefully diving in between its mechanical sweeps, police open fire with plastic bullets. I watch two molotovs make beautiful arcs and land within a few feet of the machine, producing spectacular, but momentary, splashes of flame. They don't seem to do any damage.

No snatch squads appear to be operating at the moment, so I lie down to rest; but it seemed almost as soon as I had rested a few minutes Buffy is there, tapping me on the shoulder. "Hey, David! We're trying to gather some folks together to head down towards the highway. There's a main entry point there that's really lightly guarded."

"Oh, okay."

"Are there any other members of your affinity group in the park?"

"No, I think I lost them."

Within a few minutes I'm back with the Bloc, in the same spot as before, but this time everyone is there: La Resistance, Craig's group, the PEI kids—only Montréal is missing. We head down St. Jean, then downhill to the occasional cheers of pedestrians, descend to the highway and scope out the situation.

The situation though turns out to be a little too hectic for my taste. There's already a battle going on, with at least five or six cops crouched in the darkness behind a wide chain-link gate, red lasers from their sights sweeping and darting everywhere. There's a huge empty stretch of asphalt, and sheltered spaces where people—I think they're students, definitely not Black Bloc, but really I have no idea who they are—are mixing molotovs in empty glass coke-bottles. Every minute or so one will emerge from their cover and loft it over the gate.

"It doesn't look so lightly defended any more," I say to Buffy.

She furls her brow as another splash of flame lights up the gate momentarily. "Well, we'll see what we can make of it."

The Bloc itself had long since consensed on no molotovs, but now that the genie was out of the bottle, as it were, some of us were at least willing to help prepare them. "After all," someone says, "we said we'd follow the lead of the local people." Others—Lee for instance—are looking extremely skeptical. I found the whole scene enormously disturbing. CS was landing everywhere. Cops were firing apparently indiscriminately. There was one weird guy twirling slowly around in the very middle of everything, dancing in and out of the lights and clouds to a music that must have existed only in his head.

"Jeez, what would make someone act like that?" someone asks.

"I'm guessing Ecstasy."

I figure this is why they tell you never to bring drugs to an action.

Myself, I have no interest in helping anyone try to set someone else on fire—

even police in flame-retardant body armor—so it occurs to me this might not be a bad moment to check in with the IMC. I will make one last attempt to locate Karen. They'll probably have a clearer idea what's going on in the city, too, and whether we've really shut down the Summit. Retreating to a nearby streetlamp to consult my map, I realize it's quite close. I wave good luck to everyone (nobody really notices), watch for a moment as they descend to positions closer to the gate.

A few minutes later, I'm passing under a highway ramp where Food Not Bombs is rolling out vast tureens for an upcoming free kitchen. There's a small tent village, and punk-rockers setting up a sound system from the back of a truck. This must be the Ile Fleuriot. It's kind of a grimy, clammy space, but there are already a few hundred people starting to gather for the party. I make a note: I'm supposed to be meeting people here at the party later on. Then I pass the now shuttered Army/Navy store and, finally, descend into the IMC.

7:15PM, I enter the IMC

At the IMC, everything is different. For one thing, there's security now. No one is allowed inside without an Indymedia ID. There's a big fellow at the door, who seems to belong to the building. Downstairs, where once there had been a handful of drowsy, happy activists, the space is now crammed and full of grim efficiency. On the tables are rows of computers and video cameras; there are laptops all over the floor. Wires cover everything. Every electric socket has an extension cord and seven or eight devices plugged into it. Near the door is an enormous pile of gear, gas masks, raincoats, water bottles, every sort of protective equipment. On the walls, lists of rules, work shifts, teams, phone numbers, events. Next to the door is an improvised security desk where you show your ID a second time; behind it, a girl with dark curly hair who looks like a high school student. I flash my IMC card. It turns out she is, in fact, a high school student: part of a small group from another province who are in the city on some sort of alternative media grant. She looks more than a little overwhelmed.

Maybe a third of the faces are familiar to me from other actions. I spot Celia, who I met in the IMC in Philadelphia during the Republican Convention. At the time, we were both working on the team doing liaison with the corporate media. I was a complete neophyte. She, in her mid-thirties, was an experienced media activist, who ended up organizing most of our press conferences.

"Hey, Celia!"

"Oh, hi, David. Just get into town?"

"No, I got through at Akwesasne. One of the few. Been here since Friday morning. You?"

"Me? I've been in town since Wednesday." She paused. "So, what do you think?"

"I've never experienced anything like it." I started going on about Friday and the exhilaration of bringing down the wall.

Celia, however, is unimpressed by macho heroics, and starts telling me instead about her own high point: a ceremony on the first day conducted by the Living River. Had I seen it? She had just been editing images from it on a nearby computer: the blue stream coming to rest along the streets of St. Jean, everything falling silent, then, suddenly, a hundred people simultaneously throwing rolls of toilet paper into the air, creating an effect like a fluttering, billowing sea. After which a Wiccan offered a beautiful incantation.

The images on the computer screen were small and I doubted they really give a full sense of the moment. Still, they were impressive. I look them over even after Celia is called away a moment later, then poke around until I find the legal person who has been keeping track of IMC arrestees. There have been several, but most of them within the last several hours and none of them were Karen. Neither has anyone been in contact with her.

I do find someone who knows Sasha's number, so I use the IMC phone to call him. But it goes straight to voicemail. I check messages. Call friends.

Nothing.

Is it possible she just went home and didn't tell anyone? For an activist, that would have been incredibly irresponsible. But of course, Karen is not an activist.

7:30PM, still in the IMC

Independent Media Centers are another institution born of the WTO protests in Seattle: they are meant to be a way for activist journalists to provide their own account of events, and actually convey the protesters' message, which the corporate media almost never does. By 2001, there were permanent IMCs in most major North American cities and, increasingly, across the world. Huge ones would also come into being temporarily during every major mobilization. IMCs ran on essentially anarchist principles. Everything was done collectively: people edited each other's stories; there was no hierarchy of editors and reporters; all decisions were made by consensus. The IMC would host live radio shows, prepare videos, and during the key days of action, release a daily newspaper reporting on events. Most immediately, though, it maintained a web page, where one could find up-to-the-minute information on the actions as they happened. One side of the page was open—anyone could post—and, therefore, it largely resembled the rumor mill on the streets; but the center of the page was all dispatches from IMC reporters, who prided themselves on maintaining more exacting standards of accuracy than the corporate press.

Here at the activist info hub, I was finally able to start piecing together the kind of comprehensive, panoramic information that is simply unavailable on the streets. The picture was frightening.

The police had been moving downhill steadily since 6PM, much more rapidly than they had the day before. This time, their strategy was first to seize key points and intersections, then to follow up with mop-up operations and arrest anyone still on the streets within occupied territory. They were also adopting a posture of hands-on brutality. Several Indymedia videographers had already been beaten and arrested. One of the first police targets was the Clinic, where our medics were treating all the worst injuries. First, police had lobbed tear gas directly through the windows, shattering glass and forcing the medics to evacuate the wounded. Fifteen minutes later, a squad of police showed up at the new, makeshift clinic they'd created in the alleyway outside and marched everyone out at gunpoint, rousting patients out of stretchers, appropriating medical supplies, stripping everyone of goggles and gas masks and even vinegar-soaked bandanas, then driving them down the long stairs that wound down from the Côte d'Abraham. The big battle had now shifted to the heart of the Green Zone. Thousands of people had gathered for the free food and dance party that was supposed to celebrate the day's action. Many were coming from the march and People's Summit; there were children and old people. Then, suddenly, the police attacked. The acre-wide "Temporary Autonomous Zone" under the highway was transformed into a vast cloud of tear gas. Would-be partygoers responded by occupying the highway overhead. The police were currently trying to dislodge them, but there were by now at least three thousand of them and they were putting up stiff resistance.

We didn't have clear numbers yet for arrests and injuries. Official numbers, dutifully repeated by TV and wire services, were sheerest fantasy: the cops were reporting about forty injuries since Friday, of which, they claimed, about half were police. Our medics were reporting they had treated over a thousand injuries on the first day alone: including several asthmatics who nearly died from the gas, dozens of broken bones and some very serious burns. The authorities were also still claiming that only a few dozen had been arrested, despite the sweeps in the Old City. This also could not possibly be true. We were already receiving the usual frightening reports, by now familiar in the US, of intentional abuse of prisoners. Buses full of handcuffed detainees were being driven in circles around the city for twelve or thirteen hours to avoid legalities; arrestees who actually were booked were being hog-tied, denied access to water or toilet facilities; injured activists were being denied medical treatment, stripped, hosed down with icy water and left freezing in unheated cells.

Everyone is worrying the IMC will be the next target. This is not just because of its obvious strategic importance in giving activists (and everybody else) some idea what's going on. Apparently, someone had scanned several pages of text that appeared to be from the police SUVs broken into the night before, with detailed intelligence reports and contingency plans on police strategy, and uploaded it to the IMC web page the night before. The editors immediately removed it and passed it on to the IMC in Seattle, who published it—noting there was no way to be sure whether it was forged or genuine. A few hours later Seattle police closed down the IMC there. It seemed reasonable to expect that, given the circumstances, the Québec IMC might be next.

The worst news, however, is that it now looks like one protester has actually been shot dead. It's not completely certain. The report first comes in by phone, from an IMC reporter by the highway. This creates a major crisis, because the question now becomes what to report. A meeting is called. It starts with maybe a dozen people huddled around a desk and ends up including almost everyone:

> ***(From notebook, 4/21/01, 7:50PM, emergency meeting, Québec IMC)***
>
> Chuck: Well, let me present this as a formal proposal then. We have an eyewitness report that a protester has been killed after being shot in the throat with a plastic bullet near the highway. Apparently some medics tried CPR, and when he didn't come around, they eventually managed to get him to an ambulance and that's the last anyone's seen of him. So I'm proposing we put the information we have on the web page. Bearing in mind that, in doing so, we'd also be effectively releasing it to the corporate media.
>
> Celia: There's also a counter-proposal that a small group of us do the leg-work to get full confirmation before we run anything. We're not the corporate media. For them, one confirmation would be enough; our job is to do it better. So the proposal is not to run with the story unless we have at least two confirmations.
>
> Chuck: Well, I agree we should definitely create such a team in any event.
>
> *Helen*. I'm taking stack for anyone who wants to express concerns now, or commentary. Bill?
>
> Bill: Well, for my own part, I'd prefer, if possible, to keep corporate media out of this, because they're fuckers.
>
> Suzette: I agree with the second proposal. We have to check further.
>
> Andrew: I also managed to get through to a street medic who confirmed the first part of the story: a young man was shot in the throat, he collapsed, he wasn't breathing, medics tried to revive him, and he was eventually taken to a hospital.
>
> *Helen*: So we can report that as confirmed?
>
> Ben: I'd say, since that part is confirmed, let's assemble a small team to investigate; see if we can get any further information from the hospital.
>
> *Helen*: So you're supporting the second proposal?
>
> Ben: Yeah.
>
> [*There are people coming in from the stairs, stripping off gear, talking excitedly*]

Helen: Quiet please! We have a consensus process going on!

Annette: I think we should think seriously about the effects of releasing anything this potentially explosive without having absolute confirmation.

Randy: As for first proposal, I agree with Annette. We have over ten thousand people here facing several thousand cops. It's already halfway to a war out there. If we spread the word that somebody died, do we want to be responsible for the result?

[*A couple people shout "yes!"*]

Annette: Look, we know the corporate media is watching everything we're doing. We put it out there, they'll run with it. If we say something that isn't true, I don't even want to think about what'll happen.

Noah: And people out there are already pissed off enough at the cops.

Chuck: …and more likely to be in the streets, getting it from the rumor mill. Word will go out that this happened. It's possible, if we run a story saying only what's already confirmed, then someone who knows the rest of the story will call in and tell us. It might be the only realistic way we could have of finding out.

Riley: We've already had reports of several molotovs having been thrown, several points where there have been pitched battles with the cops.

[*Everyone is standing in a circle by now.*]

Suzette: There have also been a lot of incorrect rumors about the Summit being shut down. How do we know any of those stories are even true?

David: Well, I can confirm the molotovs. I've seen quite a few of them by now.

Sheila: Excuse me—point of process. This entire meeting is being conducted in English. Is there anyone who doesn't speak English and wants an explanation of what's going on?

[*One woman does. Sheila gives her an update in French and provides simultaneous translation for the rest of the discussion.*]

Helen: Well, it sounds to me like we've come to…

Jamie [*newly arrived*]: Look, I saw this guy get shot! This happened.

Andrew: Wait, you were there? You saw it?

From the Door: COPS ARE ENTERING THE BUILDING!

The meeting dissolves into a scramble. The cops must be in the upstairs offices, since apparently they're not yet on the stairs. Someone shouts: "QUICKLY, GET THE KEY! GET IT RIGHT NOW!" Someone else is checking the stairs; others grab phones, punching steadily trying to find an open line, trying to contact IMC reporters on the street. After a moment, the crisis subsides. It looks like the cops hadn't done more than poke their heads in, shoot a bullet down the stairs just to scare us, and then make off. Slowly, everyone tries to breathe again, change registers, exit crisis mode. The meeting reconvenes and Jamie, the eyewitness, still geared up with a red bandana and green goggles on top of his head, provides more details: this one guy, the victim, was for some reason by himself not far from the wall, maybe twenty meters from the police. Suddenly two shots rang out and he was hit twice in rapid succession, once in the shoulder, once in the throat. You could see from the lasers that they were aiming directly at his head.

I had a horrified thought: was this that same guy I'd seen dancing in the middle of the melee down by the highway. It had to be. Who else could it be? It would be amazing if that guy *hadn't* gotten shot. Or, no… didn't someone else say it happened in an area outside of the action?

> *Helen*: So it sounds like the emerging consensus is around the second proposal: not to send anything out immediately, but to try to confirm the story. Does anyone have serious concerns with that?
>
> Bill: I'm still not clear how we would do that. We don't know the guy's name. The only way to confirm the name would be from the cops.
>
> Celia: We can contact all the local hospitals. I'll volunteer to be in the team so we can, eventually, publish this.
>
> Joe: I'm really afraid that if we spread false rumors, we'll seriously discredit ourselves.
>
> Riley [*on the phone*]: I'm getting a report from an IMC reporter on the streets outside; he says there's all sorts of police brutality going on up above. Apparently six cops are surrounding the door right now…
>
> Someone else: Some medics say they're coming down. It's an emergency.
>
> Annette: We have to bear in mind the whole world is watching us. If anything we report turns out to be inaccurate, no one will ever forget it. I wouldn't even mention the fact that there are rumors at this point.
>
> (*Medics enter*)

The medics were, unsurprisingly, looking for a new space to set up shop. Could they use the upstairs offices for a temporary clinic? The consensus seems to be that it's not likely to be a very safe location, since we're probably about to be invaded ourselves, but there are not a whole lot of viable alternatives. The medics take off to alert their network.

As a space, the IMC was particularly vulnerable. First of all, there was only one point of access: the stairs. If the police did show up, we'd all be instantly trapped here in the basement. Second, the building did not seem to have a functioning ventilation system. One tear gas canister down the stairs would make it uninhabitable. Already people were jamming scarves and sweaters under the cracks of the doors to prevent bad air from seeping in. The question is, if the cops do try to enter, should we try to defend the space, should we practice nonviolent civil disobedience (everyone sit on the floor, refuse to comply with orders, go limp if they try to carry us), or should we surrender and comply? An earlier meeting had consensed on the second strategy, but in light of developments it was critical to make sure everyone was still on the same page. Also, to try to ensure we have enough advance warning that anyone unwilling to risk arrest was given an option to get out beforehand.

Hardly has this meeting begun, however, when we're faced with another medical crisis. A young woman is escorted down the stairs, carrying a seven-month-old baby. She's sobbing quietly. The baby's screaming. Her IMC escort is desperately searching for a medic.

"Medics? I think they just left."

"Why? What happened?"

"Is the baby sick?"

"The fuckers gassed it."

"What? They gassed a baby?"

Her escort explains the mother is a Food Not Bombs volunteer, who was down at the Green Zone ladling soup when the police attacked. She immediately grabbed her child and took off for higher ground, but a canister landed directly at her feet as she was fleeing.

"Wow. Do you think it was an accident or do you think they actually saw the baby?"

The mother, who up to now had been silent, glared at him. "Of course they saw the baby!" she said, in thickly accented English. "They were thirty meters away from us!"

"The motherfuckers!"

Half the people in the room were speechless. Two women offered to hold the infant, whose face was bright crimson, tried to bounce and quiet him. His name, we learned, was Gabe.

"I can't believe they gassed a fucking baby."

"And they wonder why people throw rocks at the police."

Someone fetches water; someone else suggests they wait for the medics at the very top of the stairwell, where there's a landing on the sixth floor with an open window and relatively untainted air (it had previously been used as the IMC smoking section). It's after eight and I'm beginning to think it will actually be safer under the highway, where at least there'll be escape routes. A woman who is part of some locally based documentary collective is at the pile of gear, holding up my gas mask. Can she use it "for just ten minutes?" Her crew just wants to go outside to get a few shots of the police.

"Well, is there chance it will be longer than ten minutes? Because I really have to leave."

"No, no," she says. "We will be right back."

I hesitate, make a subjective assessment of the situation. She is a professional videographer, with the kind of air of abrupt efficiency that, to me at least, suggests "person who would lie about this sort of thing without even thinking about it." On the other hand, we are in the sort of communal situation where one cannot really refuse a direct request without an explicit reason, and I really can't say I have one.

"Okay. But I really am going to need it back in ten minutes."

Half an hour later, I'm still waiting. I spend some time futzing around the office, once again confirming that none of the innumerable cell phone rechargers in the IMC will, in fact, recharge my make of phone. I try to see if there's work I can do—I did promise to contribute an hour's work, back when I got my ID card. But everyone is far too distracted. Neither is it possible to find a free computer on which to check my email. Without my mask, I'm basically trapped here. Anyway, if I leave, I'll definitely never get it back. So I head upstairs to help with the baby, who is still up on the landing. Even there, there's not too much I can do other than provide moral support, but it's a fascinating space, all concrete and industrial, with two big factory-style windows tilted slightly open. From one, you can see a rooftop now occupied by police. They're only twenty or thirty feet away, some of them, though, still utterly impersonal in gas masks, visors, and armor. They don't seem to be aware of us.

With nothing better to do, I started to scribble:

> ***(From my notes again)***
>
> The problem with the IMC is it's a bubble—not just in the literal sense (no one wishing to open doors or windows and risk the tear gas getting in), but also because it's sealed off from the sense of immediacy, fellowship, and spontaneous intimacy you have on the streets where you're facing continual, tangible danger. Here, everything is mediated. You're in a florescent room full of screens and monitors, you see nothing for yourself but still you know each and every one of the worst things that are happening: every arrest, every grievous injury, every new police outrage. The resulting mood isn't exactly one of hysteria; it is more a kind of manic jumpiness that comes from having far too much information.
>
> But, on reflection, isn't this what news basically consists of? A national report largely consists of the worst things that happen, in any given day, in America. An international report lists the worst things that have happened in the world.

Finally, around 8:45, the video crew returns, chattering animatedly in French.

Then they're about to leave again.

"Excuse me, my gas mask?"

"Oh, yes."

Upstairs, the building security guy is only allowing people out in groups, for fear of letting gas inside the building. "I really don't recommend going outside right now," he tells me. "There are cops all over. It's extremely dangerous."

I tell him I'll take my chances. Finally, after about five minutes, someone is rapping on the glass door from the outside, and I'm back on the streets.

8:50PM, Outside

Free at last! At least, oddly, that's what it feels like to be back in the war zone.

Riot cops occupy the wooden stage at the very top of the great stairs leading up to the Old City; they seem to have taken all the commanding eminences. This entire area of the city is wreathed in gas. They're using the more powerful, military grade stuff that everyone refers to as "CS" though I don't know if it really is (the IMC people weren't sure). Just breathing without a mask is already physically painful; passing through low-lying areas leaves the unprotected coughing and gagging; new rounds are falling regularly. There are only a few shadowy figures on the street. I take a lane behind the IMC that seems like it's leading to the highway, and almost immediately run into Kitty. We both start laughing.

We hug. It's probably the seventh time we've hugged today.

"So what's up? Where's everybody? Are they all okay?"

"Well, Andrea got hit twice and went home. She gave her gas mask to Lee (I get the sleeping bag). Everyone else is okay. We're all down at the Temporary Autonomous Zone under the highway. We've been under attack for at least an hour now. It's amazing! There are thousands of people there now, more coming all the time. There was a pitched battle, and we won."

She goes on to describe the building of a giant bonfire in the TAZ space to neutralize the tear gas. The police brought up a water cannon to try to put it out. But people stuck it out. Meanwhile, more and more ordinary citizens are joining us. There are now thousands on the highway. They're calling them the "bangers" because, for an hour now, they've been just banging rhythmically on the metal barriers on the side of the highway, making so much of a racket that it can easily be heard at the Convention Center ten blocks away. The police started mortaring the highway too, and sent lines of troops to clear the area using beanbag guns and plastic bullets, but to no avail. Even when they started using the water cannon. Old people, families, union folk, everyone started raining bricks and boards and flaming debris down at the cops. Finally, the police withdrew.

"So what are you doing here?" I ask.

"We heard a rumor they might be moving on the IMC. I came to check if people need any help down here. What about you?"

"I was checking for news of Karen and ended up getting trapped in the IMC for an hour when someone borrowed my gas mask."

"Oh, I heard someone got in contact with Sasha, who said Karen was arrested and they took her to Montréal."

"Really? Who did you hear that from?"

"Somebody." She thinks a second. "No, can't remember. Maybe someone from New York? And do you know anything about this rumor that somebody got killed down by the highway?"

"It's all they've been talking about at the IMC for the last hour or two. But nobody seems to know if the guy is really dead."

As we scout the police positions around the IMC, we keep running into old friends. Simon, from New York, strolls out of the mist in a helmet, shield, and arm and shin guards, of exactly the sort we had been using in Ya Basta! He seems as surprised as we that he managed to get it through, and about as pleased with himself as anyone could possibly be. A lot of New York people, he reports, are finally getting through. We join most of the Refugees, various Black Bloc elements, and local residents, and set up a makeshift defense of the IMC. As police helicopters buzz overheard, people strip the boards from shops that have been boarded over, create a bonfire. Then we all start building barricades, making use of metal fences collected from the little park near the foot of the stair.

It's not a moment too soon, as buses and vans full of police reinforcements are beginning to concentrate just a block or two up the road. Battles ensue. We're driven from our positions, disperse, return, build the barricades again. We make endless phone calls trying to get reporters from the corporate press to witness the scene, hoping their presence will keep the police from invading the building. They never respond. Nonetheless, despite a few tear gas shells lobbed in windows on the stairwell, police never end up entering the building itself.

10:45PM, Côte D'Abraham

We finally get a chance to pay back our work commitment to the IMC. Shawn has a radio and agrees to do street reports for the 11–4 shift. This also gives the Refugees a new raison d'etre, and an excuse to more or less follow the action in this part of the city.

The city itself has taken on a near insurrectionary quality. It soon becomes apparent that the police have completely overplayed their hand. By dispersing their forces so far from the wall, they've ended up with no clear zones of control whatsoever: even most of Jean Baptiste is liberated territory again, with barricades and bonfires being built at a dozen different locations. We wander along the Côte d'Abraham, a winding path along the bottom of a steep bluff, the very foot of the Old City, trying to find a way back up. Isolated clusters of people are walking along the road. Many seem to be apolitical, local boys out for a good time. One good-natured crew toast us as they pass, "This is a very good night for drinking beer!" Another young man had been hit by a plastic bullet on the buttocks and is showing the welt to everyone he meets. ("Look at that! Can you see what those pigs did to me?") It's as if the easy camaraderie of the day before has now extended to the entire city—though, as we climb into the Old City, we do see a couple acts of drunken randomness as beer bottles fly through closed shop windows.

One was a corner print shop that seemed pretty obviously of the "mom and pop" variety.

"Tsk, tsk. That's not a legitimate target, is it?" says Lyn.

"On the other hand," Heidi observes, "compared with what happens after a hockey championship in this town, this is nothing. There's usually hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of damage. I think even the hooligans are holding back."

Up in the Old City, African and Asian immigrants are among the crowds defending positions against the police. Children and old people have already been evacuated. We keep running into activists from New York. Brad Will, an eco-activist living in the NYC IMC, has just got into town; he's got a huge backpack and his face is swathed in a ripped T-shirt, reeking of vinegar. "The problem," he says, "is that people just can't take the gas. We'd have driven them out of the entire neighborhood if it wasn't for the gas."

Brad directs us to a particularly dramatic scene further up the hill that might be worth reporting. Ben and I climb up the hill to investigate. There's a major battle going on as residents crouch behind a barricade of sofas, wooden doors, and bric-a-brac obviously dragged out from their basements; cops are firing on them from a position behind three or four police vehicles further up the street. Young men are pouring gasoline and sugar into empty bottles from a big plastic canister; then they stuff the bottles with rags and leave them near the edge of the barricade. Periodically, someone will take one, dash up to a little lot between two buildings, light it, and hurl it at the police—then run back again. The police, in turn, are firing pepper bombs behind the barricades to try to force people to come up for air, then shooting at their heads with plastic bullets. I watch as a molotov sails up, misses its target, and lands on the wooden lintel of a second-story window, setting a tiny fire. No one seems particularly alarmed.

"Jeez, they're going to burn down their own neighborhood!"

A moment later I was blind and couldn't breathe. Another pepper bomb. I have a distinct memory of telling myself "keep your head down, keep your head down" and, a second later, feeling like someone had just broken a bottle over my head. This is odd because no one has ever broken a bottle over my head and in fact I have no idea what it would feel like, but that was my first reaction. Apparently, I did manage to keep mostly down, and the bullet ricocheted off the very top of my head, coming to rest thirty feet behind us. I sat on the ground a second, then retreated as someone ran past, shouting something helpful in French. Back at the foot of the hill, Brad, still sputtering from the tear gas, presented me with the bullet—or anyway, it was probably the same bullet. “If that’s your first,” he said, “you might want to keep it.”

“Thanks.”

The bullet is gigantic: made of something that felt like hard green rubber, mallet-shaped, large enough to fill the palm of my hand. I tell myself: it’s a lucky thing I swallowed one of those codeine tablets an hour ago, just in case.

We end up, a few hours later, at a little shop-lined park on the edge of the lower city, at the corner of Coronne and Charest, where another huge bonfire has become the center of a spontaneous street party. Someone’s brought out a sound system, people are smoking dope and dancing in the flamelight. Others stream in from the highway, or get called away to battles a few blocks away. Cars occasionally appear, take one look at the scene, and desperately U-turn away. When we head home around 4AM, there’s talk of making yet another attack on the wall, this time from the Plains of Abraham. There are also rumors that the government was calling in the army.

Sunday, April 22

The next morning we were all aglow.

Ben: “That was just hugely successful.”

Shawn: “It was definitely the most impressive demo I’ve ever been in.”

“And I know the people of Québec City are going to have another one soon.”

I asked: “So, who exactly were all those people making noise on the highway all night? Were they really union people from the People’s Summit?”

“That was the amazing thing,” said Lyn. “They were everybody. Union people. Kids. Grannies. Old hippies. Ordinary citizens of every kind.”

“I saw high school kids,” someone chimes in, “mothers with kids, one mother-daughter team both banging away at the guard-rails with sticks. People formed a kind of impromptu rotation system to make sure the sound never started to die down.”

“ A lot of the union people had come with masks and bottles of vinegar with them on the bus, already organized into affinity groups and everything.”

“If you think about it,” said Shawn, “it was the perfect civil disobedience, because we could make this huge racket that you could hear a mile away. They could definitely hear it at the summit and the hotels where the delegates were staying. But at the same time we just couldn't be dislodged. People were already starting to bang at noon and I came back hours later and it was still going just as strong."

"Also, they were so high up I think the delegates in the Convention Center could actually see them."

Conversations like this were to continue for days, even weeks, to come, and gradually crystallize in formal "report-backs" to groups at home, web narratives, and published IMC reports, the movies and books that we all knew would eventually come out of this, if restricted to an almost exclusively activist audience. During an action, after all, one is surrounded by an almost infinity of potential narratives, some more immediate ("the cops are moving in on the IMC!"), others more abstract ("the Brazilians are looking for an excuse to sabotage the Summit"), all open-ended, uncertain, most of which everyone knows will turn out irrelevant or untrue. No one, not even at the IMC, is in a position to begin to speculate about how the story as a whole will be told afterwards, especially who won. Insofar as a game was being played, the rules of the game—even the precise nature of the field and players—were being negotiated and renegotiated continually, in action. No one involved was in direct contact with more than a tiny percentage of it (I, for instance, never saw the parade, the Bridge CD or Living River), and it was only in retrospect that we could come up with a plausible theory of what the stakes of the battle even were. Not that there is ever one definitive story, even years later—there never is, with any historical event. But these conversations played a crucial role in narrowing things down.

By noon we were back to yet another CLAC spokescouncil, somewhere on the Côte d'Abraham. The night's battles were all over, the bonfires not even smouldering—all out. The barricades, even, seemed to have been systematically destroyed by bulldozers, and large numbers of activists had already left town. Much of the discussion was about whether it would be possible to round up enough people to march on the Ministry of Justice to protest the weekend's police repression. There was also supposed to be a demo going on at the Grand Théâtre, near the water cannon, and a party somewhere else, but nothing inspiring enough to keep us from falling back to the University, to start gathering up our things to go.

Wind-down days of an action are always the most dangerous. In big mobilizations, activist numbers tend to peak at the beginning and then decline steadily, owing to injuries, arrests, and before long, people simply returning to their lives or jobs. Police numbers, on the other hand, remain constant. As soon as the balance of forces begins to tilt significantly, they will usually start to take revenge for perceived humiliations of the days before. Actions of any sort become increasingly dangerous; so, often, does walking down the street, as the cops will often begin the sort of random mass arrests they weren't able to earlier. Anyone walking alone in gear, or even in green hair, piercings, or tattoos, might be a target; but small groups are not necessarily safe either. At the same time, it's only during the wind-down that those who participated in the actions begin to get a clear picture of what happened—are able to sort the good information from the bad and, above all, start constructing some overall picture of the event as a whole. The result is a combination of increasing paranoia on the ground and an enormous flow of new and retrospective information. It was as if the sense I'd had at the IMC—the combination of sweeping panoramic view, and claustrophobic terror—had now expanded to fill the entire city, or at least, those parts that activists inhabited.

2:15PM

Back at Laval, Mac was hard at work answering phones and going through lists of arrestees at the legal office. Shawn carried out an interview with a CASA organizer from the Comité Populaire du St. Jean-Baptiste, who emphasized the need to move away from summit hopping and do work within communities. Rumor had it more people had just got in from New York. I returned to the gym, now largely empty except for endless piles of backpacks, to find them. There were at most a hundred people left. Montréal Ya Basta! were performing a little improvisation on the drums. I spent a while chatting with them, taking notes on gear and tactics to bring back to New York Ya Basta!, if, indeed, one still existed.

There was, in fact, an affinity group of seven who had just made it through, including Eric and Enos from New York and a famous activist called Bork, from D.C. Meeting them was a little disorienting at first. I had just spent two days on the streets, where anyone you met who wasn't actually shooting at you was your brother or your sister; they were just heading into action, full of secret plans and grim intensity. Still, I got to learn a little about what had happened to my friends. After everyone turned around at the customs gate at Akwesasne, they gathered to decide what to do next. Night had fallen, our few Mohawk patrons had all crossed the border and abandoned us, and figures in the darkness began shooting the occasional paintball at our vehicles. The caravan only got back to Burlington around 3AM. Some went home. Some tried to submit themselves to customs at other places the next day. Some got through. All reported aggressive questioning aimed at establishing if they were in any way associated with an organization called "Ya Basta!" Warcry joined a crew dubbed the "Snowshoe Brigade," that crossed on foot through a forest in the middle of the night. They got caught when one inexperienced kid panicked and asked a cop for directions. The remaining Ya Basta! contingent tried to take the legal route, but, after submitting themselves to customs twice, all ended up in immigration detention. Except, amusingly, for Moose. He was just turned away. Sasha was locked up with them: that's why his phone was dead. All of them were all being taken to Montréal for processing and presumably being released in a couple days. Karen, who it transpires did indeed just take off on Friday without telling anyone, is already in Montréal trying to find some way to reach Sasha.

Eventually, we hold a small New York meeting. Brad reports that the streets are growing increasingly dangerous, with black SUVs everywhere, along with stretch undercover vans, with guard windows, that seem to be Canadian intelligence. They're picking up anyone with gear—padding or shields, certainly, but even medics or IMC journalists with video cameras. Simon was arrested just this morning. Several other New Yorkers showed up in the city only to be immediately caught in sweeps.

We come up with a plan. Those who have been in action had probably best get out of town. We'll fall back on Montréal and do jail support for our friends in immigration detention, who should be coming up for hearings soon.

Returning to the law offices, I'm surprised to discover Rufus, an old friend and legendary action medic from New York, waiting in line for vegetarian burritos at a free kitchen that's been set up in a nearby hall. Kitty and Lee are there too. Rufus had been working with the medical team since Saturday and has all the details about casualties. It turns out someone was indeed shot in the throat, but he isn't dead. He'd stopped breathing for a while because his larynx was crushed, but medics managed to get him breathing and doctors later saved his life by performing a tracheotomy. He will never speak again. That was the worst single injury. Another man had his finger ripped off trying to tear down the wall but a medic sewed it right back on again. (Kitty: "Oh, I saw that happen! It wasn't from close up, but…he was gripping this cord and trying to pull down a section of wall, when this cop climbed on top of a fence and yanked back at it. His finger came right off. He was just standing there, stunned, and everybody was screaming "Medic!" Then one ran up, grabbed the finger, and went off with him.") There was another who lost an ear when a tear gas canister hit his earring. A lot of broken arms and fractured ribs.

"You weren't hit yourself, were you?" asked Lee. "Because they were definitely targeting street medics. I saw that. Not just shooting to scare them, *aiming* at them."

There is a long line of buses on the main road through campus; every hour, four or five leave to carry people back to Montréal. There is some question of whether one has to be a student but no one seems to be checking IDs. The big story in the local newspapers is that all the big hotels and restaurants had to throw out tons of food because it was tainted by gas, and that, supposedly, George W. Bush tried to take a swig out of a tainted bottle and had to spew it all out—though it's hard to imagine how this would really have happened.

We pull together a little group: Rufus, Kitty and Lee, Janna, a couple more.

4:25PM

A march is passing by Des Jardins, maybe two-hundred people, led by red and black flags. I think they're heading down to the Ministry of Justice. Kitty, who's going to join us in jail support, has somehow acquired a black flag and banner for us too.

By some miracle, the legal office has a compatible cell phone recharger. With about fifteen minutes worth of juice, I call Alison Haynes, the *Montréal Gazette* reporter I'd been meaning to call all weekend. It turns out she was at the CIBC bank too, probably one of those reporters I noticed among the onlookers. She says she'd interviewed the rainbow couple afterwards. They were from Vancouver. After we'd left they wrote a note to the CIBC saying "We're sorry, we did our best to save your bank."

I haven't talked to her for more than a minute or two when Rufus comes to tell me we're going to miss our bus. Then, of course, the phone dies. The next day in Montréal I pick up the paper and find an article with a brief quote from me, explaining it was cut off by my having to high-tail it out of town.

6:25PM, Bus to Montréal

On the bus, everyone is exchanging war stories. A couple of Montréal Yabbas are already heading home. Greg is listing the three corporate targets that got hit: the CIBC, a Shell Oil station that got trashed (the attackers spray-painted the words "Viva Ken Saro Wiwa!"), and a Subway sandwich shop. Not a McDonald's, as some people were saying. Subway was chosen because it was the second-largest fast food chain in North America, and Canadian owned. Also, some people trashed one of the TV news trucks left in the middle of the park to protest the coverage on the corporate media. He's pretty dubious though about the "little riot that night. That was pretty lame. I didn't see it, but I heard a bunch of Québécois nationalists went crazy and ended up wreaking havoc all over the Old City. I heard they even broke the windows of our clinic!"

"No, no," I said, "that was the cops."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Absolutely. I was in the IMC at the time. I even talked to the medics who came in afterwards to find a new space."

"Oh. Still, I don't know. I wasn't involved in choosing the targets, but I know that a lot of thought went into it. One bank, one oil company, one fast-food chain, one television network. I just hate to see a bunch of drunken frat boys go out and dilute the message."

Two kids from the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory are talking about how they were there for Akwesasne, but couldn't get across the police line at Cornwall.

"Really?" I ask. "Because none of us were really sure we really had any community support."

"No, no, we just couldn't get in because the police were out there with shields and batons blocking the road to everybody. Fucking pigs! This is our fucking home and it was like it was under military occupation."

"Yeah," says the other kid. "We were ready to start a riot. We'd been with the caravan in Windsor, and we wanted to join you guys in Akwesasne. But there were just too many of them."

"Really?" I ask. "Wow. I only wish we knew that at the time. We were feeling awfully lonely out there."

Mainly, though, everyone is just exhausted. Kitty stares out the window for a while. "What a strange come-down," she says. "You know what it's like? It's like coming down from acid. You know, like when you've been tripping for days and you come down and suddenly everything just *sucks*?"

Lee agrees. He's still feeling weird about the molotovs. "I feel dirty and used."

Kitty: "I don't. Well, not used, anyway. But the problem is, when you're coming down from an action, there's no way to just take another hit."

CHAPTER 5

DIRECT ACTION, ANARCHISM, DIRECT DEMOCRACY

Since this is a book about direct action, it might be best to begin by explaining what that is.

I) WHAT IS DIRECT ACTION?

Over the years, hundreds of anarchists have tried to answer this question, in pamphlets and broadsides and speeches. Here's a sampling:

> Direct action implies one's acting for one's self, in a fashion in which one may weigh directly the problem with which you are confronted, and without needing the mediation of politicians or bureaucrats. If you see some bulldozers about to wreck your house, you engage in direct action to directly intervene to try to stop them. Direct action places moral conscience up against the official law… It is the expression of the individual's readiness to fight, to take control of his life, and to try, directly, to act on the world that surrounds us, to take responsibility for one's actions.
>
> —*Sans Titres Bulletin*, "What is Direct Action?"

> To take a homely example. If the butcher weighs one's meat with his thumb on the scale, one may complain about it and tell him he is a bandit who robs the poor, and if he persists and one does nothing else, this is mere talk; one may call the Department of Weights and Measures, and this is indirect action; or one may, talk failing, insist on weighing one's own meat, bring along a scale to check the butcher's weight, take one's business somewhere else, help open a

cooperative store, etc., and these are direct actions.

—David Wieck, "Habits of Direct Action"

Direct Action aims to achieve our goals through our own activity rather than through the actions of others. It is about people taking power for themselves. In this, it is distinguished from most other forms of political action such as voting, lobbying, attempting to exert political pressure though industrial action or through the media. All of these activities... concede our power to existing institutions which work to prevent us from acting ourselves to change the status quo. Direct Action repudiates such acceptance of the existing order and suggests that we have both the right and the power to change the world. It demonstrates this by doing it. Examples of Direct Action include blockades, pickets, sabotage, squatting, tree spiking, lockouts, occupations, rolling strikes, slow downs, the revolutionary general strike. In the community it involves, amongst other things, establishing our own organizations such as food co-ops and community access radio and TV... Direct Action is not only a method of protest but also a way of "building the future now." Any situation where people organize to extend control over their own circumstances without recourse to capital or state constitutes Direct Action... Where it succeeds, Direct Action shows that people can control their own lives—in effect, that an Anarchist society is possible.

—Rob Sparrow, "Anarchist Politics and Direct Action"

Every person who ever thought he had a right to assert something, and went boldly and asserted it, himself, or jointly with others that shared his convictions, was a direct actionist... Every person who ever had a plan to do anything, and went and did it, or who laid his plan before others, and won their co-operation to do it with him, without going to external authorities to please do the thing for them, was a direct actionist... Every person who ever in his life had a difference with anyone to settle, and went straight to the other persons involved to settle it, either by a peaceable plan or otherwise, was a direct actionist.

—Voltairine De Cleyre, "Direct Action"

Man has as much liberty as he is willing to take. Anarchism therefore stands for direct action, the open defiance of, and resistance to, all laws and restrictions, economic, social and moral. But defiance and resistance are illegal. Therein lies the salvation of man. Everything illegal necessitates integrity, self-reliance, and courage. In short, it calls for free, independent spirits, for men who are men, and who have a bone in their back which you cannot pass your hand through.

—Emma Goldman, "Anarchism: What It Really Stands For"

It should be easy enough to see why anarchists have always been drawn to the idea of direct action. Anarchists reject states and all those systematic forms of inequality states make possible. They do not seek to pressure the government to institute reforms. Neither do they seek to seize state power for themselves. Rather, they wish to destroy that power, using means that are—so far as possible—consistent with their ends, that embody them. They wish to "build a new society in the shell of the old." Direct action is perfectly consistent with this, because in its essence direct action is the insistence, when faced with structures of unjust authority, on acting as if one is already free. One does not solicit the state. One does not even necessarily make a grand gesture of defiance. Insofar as one is capable, one proceeds as if the state does not exist.

This is the difference, in principle, between direct action and civil disobedience (though in practice there often is a good deal of overlap between the two). When one burns a draft card, one is withdrawing one's consent or cooperation from a structure of authority one deems illegitimate, but doing so is still a form of protest, a public act addressed at leastly partly to the authorities themselves. Typically, one practicing civil disobedience is also willing to accept the legal consequences of his actions. Direct action takes matters a step further. The direct actionist does not just refuse to pay taxes to support a militarized school system, she combines with others to try to create a new school system that operates on different principles. She proceeds as she would if the state did not exist and leaves it to the state's representatives to decide whether to try to send armed men to stop her.

Now, the reader might object: surely direct action does, usually, involve direct confrontation with representatives of the state. Even when it does not start with such a confrontation, everyone is quite aware it will probably lead to one eventually. That would certainly seem to imply recognition of their existence. True enough—but even here matters are more subtle. When confrontations occur, it is typically because those conducting a direct action insist on acting as if the state's representatives have no more right to impose their view of the rights or wrongs of the situation than anybody else. If a man is driving a truck full of toxic waste to dump in a local river, the direct actionist does not consider whether the corporation he represents is legally permitted to do so; he treats him as he would anyone else trying to dump a vat of poison in a local water source. (By this understanding, the fact that said direct actionist rarely simply attempts to physically overpower the culprit is a remarkable testimony to most activists' dedication to nonviolence.) Normally, the conclusion is that it is legitimate for any man or woman of conscience in the vicinity to band together to try to dissuade the would-be dumper, and if necessary, stop him—say, by lying down in front of the truck, or by puncturing its tires. If they do so, and twenty armed men in blue costumes then appear and tell them to clear the streets, they do not, in turn, treat this demand as a legal order, but rather, as morally equivalent to any other demand that a group of men standing on the street might make. Therefore, if police demand that those blocking the truck clear the street because an ambulance is trying to get through, they will almost certainly comply; if police make such demands simply by dint of their legal authority as representatives of the city, blockaders will ignore them; if they threaten to attack, blockaders will consider whether they are willing to take the risks involved in making a stand.[1] The key point though is that one is still acting as if, at least as a moral entity, the state does not exist.[2] At any rate it would be possible to have a secret direct action. It is by definition impossible to conduct a secret act of civil disobedience.

What I have been developing here is what might be called the classical definition of direct action—one developed and elaborated over at least a century and a half of anarchist reflection. Often, nowadays, the term is used in a much looser sense. "Direct action" becomes any form of political resistance that is overt, militant, and confrontational, but that falls short of outright military insurrection (e.g. Carter 1973). In this sense, if one is doing more than marching around with signs, but not yet ready to take to the hills with AK-47s, then one is a direct actionist. The Boston Tea Party, during which a team of colonial revolutionaries dressed as Indians dumped loads of heavily taxed British tea in the Boston harbor, is often invoked as a classic example of a direct action of this sort.[3] Such actions tend to be militant and symbolic at the same time. Used this way, the term "direct action" can cover an enormous range: it can mean anything from insisting on one's right to sit at a segregated lunch counter to setting fire to one, from placing oneself in the way of bulldozers in an old-growth forest to spiking trees so that loggers who disregard warnings not to cut in certain areas risk killing themselves.

Activists too will often talk as if the difference between direct action and civil disobedience is simply one of militancy. For some, it turns on willingness to accept arrest. Those carrying out a "CD" may willingly surrender themselves to the police; even if they don't, when they blockade the entrance to a corporate headquarters or lie down in front of a presidential motorcade, they act in the full expectation they will wind up in jail, and when police intent on arresting them appear, they will not flee and will resist only passively, or not at all. Direct actionists, in contrast, whether they are breaking windows in the night or soldering the doors shut in worker-occupied factories, are trying their best to get away with it. Or, alternately, the distinction might turn on how closely one's tactics come to conventional definitions of "violence." When English suffragettes refused to pay taxes they are usually described as practicing civil disobedience; when they began systematically breaking store windows, they are usually said to have turned to direct action. Of course, by classical anarchist definitions, smashing windows to pressure the government to enact a voting reform is not direct action in any sense at all—it is thoroughly indirect—but the usage demonstrates how much the term has become synonymous with a certain degree of militancy.

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[1] Obviously, in a real direct action situation, such questions are usually worked out in advance by affinity groups. Still, in each case, what level of risk one is willing to undergo should always be an individual decision.

[2] One might say in Althusserian terms that direct action involves a systematic refusal of interpelation. If one takes this moral view systematically, it's hard to see the police as anything but a heavily armed and extremely dangerous street gang; which is precisely the way anarchists often refer to them.

[3] Indeed, one popular game among contemporary activists is to imagine how an event like the Boston Tea Party would be reported by the American media, if it had occurred today.

All this makes it easy to see why the question of "direct action" has been so often at the center of political debate. During the first half of the twentieth century, for example, there were endless arguments about the role of direct action in the labor movement. Today, it is easy to forget that, when labor unions first appeared, they were seen as extremely radical organizations. They represented, in fact, a kind of claim to revolutionary dual power. To go on strike, to destroy machinery, occupy factories, establish picket lines so as to physically prevent scabs from entering a workplace: all this was a matter of workers seizing for themselves the right to employ coercive force, in direct defiance of the state's claims of holding a monopoly on violence. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, one of the earliest nineteenth-century anarchist philosophers, and closely attached to the French labor movement of his day, actually opposed strikes because he believed the movement should limit itself only to explicitly nonviolent forms of direct action. Very quickly, though, states that could not completely repress unions set out to co-opt them. Certain forms of industrial action (such as picket lines) were legalized, but strictly regulated; others (such as workplace sabotage) strictly forbidden. As one might imagine, all this sparked lively debate within the syndicalist movement. Georges Sorel captures something of the flavor of these debates in his essay "Reflections on Violence," published in France in 1908. In it, he argues that even when a strike or labor action really does challenge the state's monopoly on violence, even if one is dealing with an illegal, wildcat strike, strikes are not really revolutionary because ordinarily, a strike aims to win concessions on wages, hours, or conditions that the state will then guarantee and, ultimately, enforce. One is, therefore, not challenging state violence but trying to enlist it for one's own side. Sorel argued that from an anarchist point of view, the only genuinely revolutionary strike would be a general strike that aimed to overthrow the system of state violence as a whole. Labor actions therefore were legitimate only insofar as they were attempts to move in that direction, dress rehearsals, perhaps, or forms of agitprop.

In the United States, too, philosophical differences often ended up being fought out largely through arguments about tactics. The early part of the twentieth century saw a profound split between mainstream unions like the Knights of Labor, which eventually came to form the backbone of the AFL-CIO, and revolutionary unions like the IWW (the Industrial Workers of the World, or Wobblies). The latter's ultimate aim was "the abolition of the wage system," and they refused to work through the state, which they saw as an illegitimate institution. They were in essence, if not officially, anarcho-syndicalist. Where mainstream unions emphasized higher wages and job security, the Wobblies were—like European anarchist unions—more interested in reducing hours. Still, the main thing they ended up openly arguing about was the Wobbly endorsement of "direct action," which in this context basically came to mean workplace sabotage.

It's important to emphasize here that the *practice* of workplace sabotage was never considered particularly scandalous—at least among workers. The destruction of corporate property, workplace occupations, intentionally shoddy work, slowdowns—all of these have long formed part of the repertoire, the standard tool-kit, one might say, of organized labor for centuries. They remain so to this day. I myself grew up in a building in Manhattan with faulty plumbing because of workplace sabotage tracing back to some labor dispute from the late 1950s. American strikers still regularly puncture tires and even set company equipment on fire. However, none of this is official union policy. Union officials invariably condemn such actions, or else deny they occur. Part of the reason is because they *are* allowed to strike. Unions are, paradoxically, the only organizations in the US legally permitted to engage in direct action; but they can do so only if they do not call it that; and only at the cost of accepting endless and intricate regulations over how and when they can strike, what kinds of pickets they can set up and where, whether they are allowed to engage in other tactics such as secondary boycotts or even publicity campaigns, and so on. Anything that goes beyond these restrictions tends to be defined as "direct action" and officially disallowed. This is the reason, as we will see, that union leaders invariably do everything in their power to ensure that rank-and-file workers do not participate in direct actions like those in Seattle and Québec City. If union members—in their capacity *as* union members—had helped pull down the wall in Québec, for example, they would not just have been engaging in illegal activities, they would have been jeopardizing the very basis of their leadership's special relation with the state.

Those continuing to work within the syndicalist tradition will, unsurprisingly, object to this sort of identification of direct action with mere militancy. They tend to prefer definitions like those with which I began the chapter. A few have gone so far as to argue that large-scale actions like Seattle or Québec were not really direct actions at all, for just this reason. Shortly after the shutdown of the World Trade Organization in Seattle in November 1999, for example, a

Norwegian anarcho-syndicalist named Harald Beyer-Arensen wrote an article intending to show that Seattle wasn't really direct action because it did not involve people acting directly to transform their own immediate situation.

> Campaigning for wage-workers to join the Industrial Workers of the World, Eugene V. Debs stated in December 1905: "The capitalists own the tools they do not use, and the workers use the tools they do not own." To this one could add: At times direct action may mean putting the tools we do not own out of action, at times it may mean bringing them into play for our own, self-defined needs and ends. In the final instance, it can only mean acting as if all the tools were in fact our own (Beyer-Arensen 2000:11).

Once again, direct action means insisting on acting as if one is already free. This is why, he goes on to argue, it lies at the heart of the "anarchist, social revolutionary project": it is the means by which the working classes can emancipate themselves by their own efforts, rather than the guidance of any sort of revolutionary vanguard or elite.

> From this perspective we can define direct action as being an action carried out on the behalf of nobody else but ourselves, where the means are immediately also the ends, or if not, as in a wage strike, not mediated by any union bureaucracy, where the means (decreasing the bosses' profits by our non-work, and thus also diminishing the bosses' power) stand in an immediate relationship to self-defined ends (increasing our wages and extending our own power). A direct action successfully carried out brings about a direct rearrangement of existing conditions of life through the combined efforts of those directly affected (ibid.).

What happened at Seattle? A group of activists tried—and, for a while, succeeded—in shutting down a meeting of trade bureaucrats so as to disrupt negotiations on a new WTO round, and to make a public issue out of the very existence of the World Trade Organization. This, Beyer-Arensen is willing to allow, does in certain ways resemble direct action. Certainly, those who created the "Direct Action Network" to coordinate the proceedings believed that's what they were doing. If one simply applies the criterion of militancy, one might be tempted to agree, because the event did involve a prolonged (if nonviolent) confrontation with the police. But in fact, Beyer-Arensen insists, it was not really direct action, because it was not really "direct." He provides an example. Imagine a town that suffers from a lack of water. What's more, some real estate magnate owns all the surrounding land and has the mayor in his pocket, so townsfolk cannot simply build new wells. If one were to assemble a group of townsfolk to dig a new well anyway, in defiance of the law, then that would be direct action. But if one were to have them blockade the mayor's house until he changed his policy, that would certainly not be. It might be far more militant than writing petitions or letters or lobbying, but it's just another version of the same thing: an appeal to the powers-that-be to change their behavior. It still recognizes the authority a real direct actionist would reject. Beyer-Arensen concludes that the effort to shut down the WTO meetings in Seattle was not an example of direct action because, ultimately, it was simply an attempt to create a media spectacle that would then "influence the powers-that-be by way of some imagined 'public opinion'" (200:12). The WTO meetings themselves were, after all, basically ceremonial. Most real decisions are made elsewhere. Therefore, the real purpose of the protests was to provide a kind of counter-ceremony aimed at winning public attention, since its ostensible aims (to shut down the WTO as an institution) could not possibly be accomplished by the means employed. It was essentially an act of propaganda, of guerilla theater, meant to influence government policy.

Beyer-Arensen ends the piece by admitting that any direct action is to a certain degree an act of "propaganda by the deed," since they are meant to teach through example. The community that defies the law by building its own well is not simply acting for themselves; they are also setting an example of self-organization to other communities. But this is a secondary effect of an otherwise direct action, and anyway, they're not trying to influence the government.

Now, I'm not citing this argument at such length because I find it particularly persuasive. It represents the opinions of one, older, rather curmudgeonly anarcho-syndicalist and I believe the overwhelming majority of contemporary anarchists would certainly disagree with its conclusions. After all, as Sorel pointed out, one could apply this same logic to the very labor actions Beyer-Arensen approves of: since ultimately strikers are seeking binding arbitration by government mediators and even if they are not, any agreements they make with their employers will end up being enforced by the state. If one takes Beyer-Arensen's line of argument to its logical conclusion, no action that occurs under a framework of legality, or in which public opinion is a factor, could possibly be considered direct. After all, if one places one's body in the path of the bulldozer about to destroy one's home, or a community garden, much though one might like to think what one is doing is simply appealing to the moral conscience of the driver, one cannot realistically deny that the driver is also likely to be thinking about the possibility of being brought up on charges of negligent homicide, or of being written up in the papers the next day as a heartless killer. Beyer-Arensen himself is not entirely unaware of this dilemma—at least in the case of strikes. He ends his essay by suggesting that certain strikes are actually better examples of direct action than others. His favorite example is a strike by transit workers in Melbourne during the 1980s in which, rather than walking off their jobs, bus drivers and train conductors stayed on, but stopped collecting fares—effectively making mass transportation free until the action was over. Imagine, he suggests, what would happen if, for just one day, workers in every branch of industry and service trade did the same. This alone could be a major step in showing how a capitalist economy could be transformed into an economy of freedom.

This is a powerful image, but it bears a remarkable resemblance to acts that Beyer-Arensen would no doubt condemn as pure theater. Take for example a publicity stunt organized by members of the squatter community of Christiana, located on the site of a former army base outside Copenhagen:

> In 1974, the community engaged in various forms of street theatre to gain a more favorable public image. "The first Christmas for the poor and lonely was arranged and Solvognen organized an army of Father Christmases who generously handed out presents to both young and old from the city's department stores. Naturally, they were arrested, but as a consequence, pictures of the Police beating up Father Christmases hit the front pages of the papers worldwide.[4]

In other words, they made almost exactly the same point as the Melbourne strikers, but with hardly any real direct action at all. So then the question becomes: where to draw the line? How direct does it have to be? If providing free goods and services to four or five random kids on the street is not enough to make it real, why should ten thousand commuters, for one day, be any different?

The reason I cited this argument at length is that it provides a window on a certain moral universe. Most American anarchists I know find arguments about whether Seattle was really a direct action a bit silly—at best they might make a mildly diverting topic for discussion over beer, but to take such questions too seriously seems academic, even sectarian. Still, the underlying issues are critical. As we'll see, most of the objections raised to the idea of border actions in the weeks before Québec City were based on a feeling such actions would be merely symbolic, not genuine direct action. Moreover, the essence of Beyer-Arensen's critique—that actions like Seattle are largely symbolic, and that the point is to work within real communities in ways that allow people to take power over their own lives—is something anyone involved in the movement would agree with. Even before Naomi Klein (2000) wrote her famous article in the *Nation* warning activists about the dangers of "summit hopping," of "following trade bureaucrats as if they were the Grateful Dead," all this was already a major item of debate. Those who defended actions like Seattle not only insisted that it was a direct intervention, since people put their bodies on the line so as to block delegates from entering the building, but that they did so in just the way that Beyer-Arensen underlines as key: by mobilizing a community of people in a form of self-organization which provides a living alternative to the existing structure of authority.

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[4] http://www.ri.xu.org/arbalest/index.html, accessed 8/17/2000.

This was indeed meant as educational. On the one hand, they set out to expose the undemocratic nature of the WTO and similar institutions that, they felt, together formed the backbone of an unaccountable world neoliberal government that sought the power to suppress existing democratic rights in the name of corporate power. On the other hand, they were determined to organize the whole action according to directly democratic principles and thus provide a living example of how genuine egalitarian decision making might work. When dealing with global institutions, this is about as direct as an action can possibly get.

The Direct Action Network, which forms much of the immediate focus of this book, emerged directly from this project. It was meant in part as a way of organizing actions against neoliberal institutions; in part, as a model of consensus-based, decentralized direct democracy. For all its flaws (and we will be learning a good deal about those), it played an important role in doing so.

To sum up, then: direct action represents a certain ideal—in its purest form, probably unattainable. It is a form of action in which means and ends become, effectively, indistinguishable; a way of actively engaging with the world to bring about change, in which the form of the action—or at least, the organization of the action—is itself a model for the change one wishes to bring about. At its most basic, it reflects a very simple anarchist insight: that one cannot create a free society through military discipline, a democratic society by giving orders, or a happy one through joyless self-sacrifice. At its most elaborate, the structure of one's own act becomes a kind of micro-utopia, a concrete model for one's vision of a free society. As Emma Goldman (and others) observed, the fact that the authorities define such acts as crimes is not a problem in this regard—insofar as it serves to constantly remind actors to take responsibility for their actions, and behave with courage and integrity, it can be a great advantage. The problems, rather, come when one moves beyond confrontation to other forms of engagement with a world organized along different lines.

A revolutionary strategy based on direct action can only succeed if the principles of direct action become institutionalized. Temporary bubbles of autonomy must gradually turn into permanent, free communities. However, in order to do so, those communities cannot exist in total isolation; neither can they have a purely confrontational relation with everyone around them. They have to have some way to engage with larger economic, social, or political systems that surround them. This is the trickiest question because it has proved extremely difficult for those organized on radically democratic lines to so integrate themselves in any meaningful way in larger structures without having to make endless compromises in their founding principles. For direct action-based groups, even working in alliance with radical NGOs or labor unions has often created what seem like insuperable problems. On a more immediate level, the strategy depends on the dissemination of the model: most anarchists, for example, do not see themselves as a vanguard whose historical role is to "organize" other communities, but rather as one community setting an example others can imitate. The approach—it's often referred to as "contaminationism"—is premised on the assumption that the experience of freedom is infectious, that anyone who takes part in a direct action is likely to be permanently transformed by the experience, and want more. This is quite often the case, but it begs the question of how to make others aware of the idea in the first place. What participants experience as profound and transformative often looks, from the outside, as peculiar at best—at worst cult-like or insane. This, in turn, raises the issue of the media. But in addressing such strategic questions, I am really moving from speaking just of direct action to the more general question of anarchism.

II) WHAT IS ANARCHISM?

One reason I started the chapter as I did was because I also wanted to convey something of the flavor of anarchist debate, which has always tended to differ from the more familiar, Marxist style in focusing more on these kind of concrete questions of practice. Many have complained that anarchism lacks high theory. Even those who are considered its founding figures—Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin—often seem more pamphleteers and moralists than true philosophers, and the best-known anarchists of more recent times have been more likely to produce witty slogans, wild poetic rants, or science fiction novels than sophisticated political economy or dialectical analysis.[5] There are thousands of Marxist academics but very few Anarchist ones. This is not because anarchism is anti-intellectual so much as because it does not see itself as fundamentally a project of analysis. It is more a moral project.

As I've written elsewhere (Graeber 2002, 2004), Marxism has tended to be a theoretical or analytical discourse about revolutionary strategy; anarchism, an ethical discourse about revolutionary practice. The basic principles of anarchism—self-organization, voluntary association, mutual aid, the opposition to all forms of coercive authority—are essentially moral and organizational.

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[5] In fact, anarchists have long taken much of their political economy from Marxists—a tradition which goes back to Bakunin, who though he was a political rival of Marx, also was responsible for the first translation of *Capital* into Russian—rather than feeling obliged to set up some anarchist school of political economy of their own. Though to be fair, early anarchists also tended to point out that almost all the concepts attributed to Marx (or for that matter Proudhon) were really developed within the worker's movement of the time, and merely systematized and elaborated by the theorists.

Admittedly, this flies in the face of the popular image of anarchists as bomb-throwing crazies opposed to all forms of organization—but, if one examines how this reputation came about, it tends to reinforce my point. The period of roughly 1875 to 1925 marked the peak of a certain phase of anarchist organizing: there were hundreds of anarchist unions, confederations, revolutionary leagues, and so on. There was a spurt, towards the beginning, of calls for the assassination of heads of state (Anderson 2006), it was quite brief and anarchist spokesmen and organized groups quickly withdrew support from this strategy as counterproductive. Nonetheless, following decades saw a continual stream of dramatic assassinations by people calling themselves anarchists. I am not aware of any actual assassin during this particular period who actually was a product of those anarchist organizations, much less were their actions planned or sponsored by them; rather they almost invariably turned out to be isolated individuals with no more ongoing ties to anarchist life than the Unabomber, and usually about a roughly equivalent hold on sanity. It was rather as if the existence of anarchism gave lone gunmen something to call themselves.[6] But the situation created endless moral dilemmas for anarchist writers and lecturers like Peter Kropotkin or Emma Goldman. By what right could an anarchist denounce an individual who kills a tyrant, no matter how disastrous the results for the larger movement? The whole issue was the subject of endless intense moral debate: not only about whether such acts were (or could ever be) legitimate, but about whether it was legitimate for anarchists who did not feel such acts were wise or even legitimate to publicly condemn them. It has always been these kinds of practical, moral questions that have tended to stir anarchist passions: What is direct action? What kind of tactics are beyond the pale and what sort of solidarity do we owe to those who employ them? Or: what is the most democratic way to conduct a meeting? At what point does organization stop being empowering and become stifling and bureaucratic? For analyses of the nature of the commodity form or the mechanics of alienation, most have been content to draw on the written work of Marxist intellectuals (which are usually, themselves, drawn from ideas that originally percolated through a broader worker's movement in which anarchists were very much involved). Which also means that, for all the bitter and often violent disagreements anarchists have had with Marxists about how to go about making a revolution, there has always been a kind of complementarity here, at least *in potentia*.[7]

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[6] Malatesta made exactly this argument at the time (1913).

[7] If existing Marxists were to abandon practical politics entirely and retreat into the academy, producing endless volumes of Marxist analyses on every topic under the sun and overwhelming all other intellectual tendencies, then most anarchists would consider this an altogether positive development.

This is why I think it's deceptive to write the history of anarchism in the same way one would write the history of an intellectual tradition like Marxism. It is not that one cannot tell the story this way if one wants to. Most books on anarchism do. They start with certain founding intellectual figures (Godwin, Stirner, Proudhon, Bakunin), explain the radical ideas they developed, tell the story of the larger movements that eventually came to be inspired by those ideas, and then document the political struggles, wars, revolutions, and projects of social reform which ensued. But if one looks at what those supposed founding figures actually said, one finds most of them did not really see themselves as creating some great new theory. They were more likely to see themselves as giving a name and voice to a certain kind of insurgent common sense, one they assumed to be as old as history. While anarchism, as a movement, tended to be very strongly rooted in mass organizing of the industrial proletariat, anarchists (including those who were themselves industrial workers) also tended to draw inspiration from existing modes of practice, notably on the part of peasants, skilled artisans, or even, to some degree, outlaws, hobos, vagabonds, and others who lived by their wits—in other words, those who were to some degree in control of their own lives and conditions of work, who might be considered, at least to some degree, autonomous elements. One might say, in Marxist terms, that they were people with some experience of non-alienated production. Such people had experience of life outside of state or capitalist bureaucracies, salaries and wage labor; they were aware such relations were not inevitable; quite often, they viewed them as intrinsically immoral. They were often themselves more drawn to anarchism as an explicit political philosophy, and at least in some times and places (Spanish peasants, Swiss watchmakers) formed its mass base—what's more, those elements of the industrial proletariat that tended to find the most affinity with anarchism were those who were the least removed from other modes of life. Marx himself tended to dismiss the anarchist base as a particularly inauspicious combination of "petty bourgeoisie" and "lumpen proletariat," and considered the notion that they could in any way stand outside capitalism ridiculous. Capitalism, for Marx, was a totalizing system. It shaped the consciousness of all those who lived under it in the most intimate fashion. The kind of critiques of capitalism one saw in authors like Proudhon or Bakunin, Marx argued, were simply the voice of a petit bourgeois morality, the small-scale merchants and producers railing against the bigger ones. They had nothing to teach revolutionaries. Only the industrial proletariat, who had absolutely no stake in the existing system, could be a genuinely revolutionary class.

Some would no doubt object that this view of Marx's thought is a bit crude and unnuanced and probably they'd be right. But it represents the view that soon became canonical among those who claimed to speak in the name of Marxism.

My purpose here is not to argue the merits of the case but to emphasize the degree to which we have been viewing the entire anarchist project, essentially, through the eyes of its rivals. Even more, that anarchism tends to involve a different relation of theory and practice than what came to be called 'Marxism'. The latter is—for all the materialist pretensions—profoundly idealist. The history of Marxism is presented to us as a history of great thinkers—there are Leninists, Maoists, Trotskyites, Gramscians, Althusserians—even brutal dictators like Stalin or Enver Hoxha had to pretend to be great philosophers, because the idea was always that one starts with one man's profound theoretical insight and the political tendency follows from that. Anarchist tendencies, in contrast, never trace back to a single theorist's insights—we don't have Proudhonians and Kropotkinites—but Associationalists, Individualists, Syndicalists, and Platformists. In just about every case, divisions are based on a difference of organizational philosophy and revolutionary practice.

How, then, do we think about a political movement in which the practice comes first and theory is essentially, secondary?

It strikes me that it might be helpful, rather than starting from the word "anarchism," to start from the word "anarchist." What sorts of people, or ideas or institutions, can this word refer to? Generally speaking, one finds three different ways the term can be employed. First, one can refer to people who endorse an explicit doctrine known as "anarchism" (or sometimes "anarchy")—or perhaps more precisely, a certain vision of human possibilities. This is more less the conventional definition. Anarchists become the bearers of an intellectual tradition: one whose history can indeed be traced back to founding figures in the nineteenth century, that spread quite rapidly by the turn of the century to the point where anarchist literature was being avidly read in places like China and India well before Marxism or other strains of Western revolutionary thought had made much of an impression (e.g., Dirlik 1991), but over the course of the early twentieth century was largely displaced by it.[8] Any number of prominent figures of the time, from Picasso to Mao, began their political lives as anarchists and ended up Communists. But one can also speak more broadly. It's certainly not unheard of to hear historians refer to, say, peasant rebels in early China, or religious radicals in medieval Europe as "anarchists"—meaning that they rejected the authority of governments, and believed people would be better off in a world without hierarchies. In this sense, there have always been anarchists, and there is no great intellectual tradition that hasn't seen the development of anarchist ideas in one form or another. (This is of course why the ideas of nineteenth-century European anarchists could make sense to people in other parts of the world to begin with.) Finally, there is a third sense. When an anthropologist like Evans-Pritchard refers to the Nuer as living in an "ordered anarchy" (1940), or Joanna Overing uses the word to describe the Amazonian Piaroa (1986, 1988), they are not referring to either doctrines or, even, quite, to anti-authoritarian rebelliousness. They are referring primarily to institutions, habits, and practices. That is, there are certain societies characterized by egalitarian forms of organization—whether systems of exchange, forms of decision-making, or simply the accustomed ways of going about everyday life—and this tends to inculcate, and be supported by, a broadly egalitarian ethos. Anarchism, in this sense, is a way of living, or at least, a set of practices.

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[8] Even here things are a bit more subtle—many of the founding figures of anarchism were Russians, who did not really identify with what they thought of as "the West"—but this is how the story is normally told.

In other words, one can see "anarchism" either as a vision, as an attitude, or as a set of practices. The distinction between the last two is admittedly somewhat fuzzy. Those who go about their daily lives on an egalitarian basis tend to do so because they feel that is what people ought to do; those who find all forms of hierarchy objectionable will, ordinarily, do their best to find ways to live without it. Still, in the first case, an egalitarian ethos may well remain largely inchoate. In theory, at least, one living in an anarchistic society might be entirely unaware that there is any other way to live; anyway, such a person will probably only develop explicit anti-authoritarian attitudes once she encounters someone with very different assumptions—say, for example, a foreign conqueror. Similarly, those indignant about being pushed around by social superiors will often examine their own ways of dealing with friends and neighbors as evidence that hierarchy is not a natural and inevitable feature of human life. They might very well start valuing the equality of those relations, or even try to deal with such people in more self-consciously egalitarian fashion than they had before. The nineteenth-century Spanish peasants and Swiss watchmakers who found the ideas of Proudhon or Bakunin so amenable—and who Marx denounced as petit bourgeois—were clearly doing exactly that.

What I would like to argue is that "anarchism" is best thought of, not as any one of these things—not as a vision, but neither quite as an attitude or set of practices. It is, rather, best thought of as that very movement back and forth between these three. After all, the experience of foreign conquest or subordination will not necessarily cause once egalitarian communities to reject the very idea of hierarchy, or to become more assiduously egalitarian in their way of dealing with each other: the effect might well be exactly the opposite. It's when the three reinforce each other—when a revulsion against oppression causes people to try to live their lives in a more self-consciously egalitarian fashion, when they draw on those experiences to produce visions of a more just society, when those visions, in turn, cause them to see existing social arrangements as even more illegitimate and obnoxious—that one can begin to talk about anarchism. Hence anarchism is in no sense a doctrine. It's a movement, a relationship, a process of purification, inspiration, and experiment. This is its very substance. All that really changed in the nineteenth century is that some people began to give this process a name.

Looking at it this way does make it much easier to understand some things that would otherwise be extremely puzzling. For example: why what passes as anarchist theory often bears so little relation to what the majority of anarchists say and do? If one were to try to understand North American anarchism simply by reading theoretical or ideological statements in the best known and widely distributed explicitly anarchist periodicals, one would end up with the impression that most anarchists were either Primitivists opposed to all forms of technology, even agriculture, or extreme anti-organizationalists, suspicious of any group of more than six or seven people—and that most of the remainder had declared their allegiance to a document called "The Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists" written by Russian émigrés in Paris in 1924. One might also come to the conclusion that the popular impression of anarchists as wild-eyed, impractical nihilists dedicated to rebellion for its own sake was probably not that far from the truth; or, at least, that anarchists seemed to be divided between nihilists and fervent sectarians whose main form of political practice is mutual denunciation. Examining anarchist discussion pages on the Internet would do little to disabuse them of this impression.[9] When I first became involved in anarchist politics, therefore, I was surprised to discover that not only did the overwhelming majority of activists who considered themselves anarchists not identify with any of these positions, many were not even aware of them. Others, who do read the magazines, read them mainly for entertainment value. Elsewhere, I've referred to these non-sectarians as "small-a" anarchists, to distinguish them from those who identify with any one particular strain: Green Anarchists, Individualists, Anarcho-Syndicalists, post-Leftists, Platformists, and so on. While statistics are unavailable, Chuck Munson, who occasionally surveys those who frequent infoshop.com—probably the most popular anarchist web site in North America—informs me that about 90% of American anarchists would seem to fit into the small-a category, since only about 10% are willing identify themselves with any particular subset.

What's more, even many of those who do identify themselves with one particular strain act in ways that would be impossible to understand if we were dealing with a political ideology in anything like the traditional sense of the term. Let me take one example—Primitivism—perhaps the most obviously *outré*. In America,

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[9] Many anarchist newsgroups, for example, tend to be dominated by right-wing free-market enthusiasts who call themselves "anarcho-capitalists," who seem to exist only on the Internet; at least, I have been involved in anarchist politics for five or six years now and have yet to actually meet one.

Primitivist ideas first began to take form in circles surrounding a journal called the *Fifth Estate*, in Detroit, in the 1970s and 1980s. The argument began as a synthesis of a certain strain of Marxism with ideas first articulated by socialist heretics such as Jacques Ellul and Jacques Camatte, who came to see the nature of technology itself as lying at the core of most of what Marx saw as alienating and oppressive about capital, and thus rejected the idea that the proletariat, as an essential part of the global "megamachine," could possibly be the agents of a revolution (Millet 2004). As part of a broader critique developing around that time of the productivist bias in traditional leftist thought, it's hard to see this as anything but perfectly normal debate. By the 1990s, however, the most aggressive strain of Primitivist thought began to coalesce around the figure of John Zerzan, one time ultra-leftist, who began expressing utter hostility not only to "the Left" but to "civilization" itself. Zerzan basically took the most radical position that it was possible to take, arguing that everything from plant domestication to music, writing, math, art, and ultimately, even speech—basically all forms of symbolic representation, anything other than absolute, direct, unmediated experience—were really forms of alienation that could only be overcome through the destruction of civilization in its entirety, and a return to the stone age. Now, the influence of Zerzan on anarchism has been considerably overstated in the media, but, there are a significant number of Green Anarchists who take his ideas very seriously, and these Green Anarchists produce any number of zines and journals that aggressively tout these ideas, engaging in constant vitriolic debates with anyone willing to cast doubt on any aspect of the ultra-Primitivist position.[10]

The idea of a return to the paleolithic—the rejection of plant domestication, let alone language—is obviously absurd. It would require reducing the earth's population by at least 99.9%. Nor are Primitivists entirely unaware of this: the *Fifth Estate* people had a long debate about the problem back in the 1970s, the editors coming to the conclusion that, since they didn't really wish to see a global catastrophe such as a nuclear war, the best one could hope for was a gradual process of negative population growth. Most current Primitivists seem to alternate between openly espousing industrial and demographic collapse—I have heard some argue that humankind is a virus which needs to be largely eradicated—to, in defiance of all logic and common sense, denying that massive population decline would even be necessary (Zerzan often does this before non-anarchist audiences). At the same time, these same authors will regularly denounce anyone who advocates the classic anarchist strategy of "building a new society in the shell of the old." They ridicule any talk of the slow, painful creation of new institutions as outmoded "Leftism," arguing that only the complete destruction of all existing structures and institutions, followed by a return to our instinctual "wildness," could possibly bring about real liberation.

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[10] Zerzan became famous immediately after Seattle in part because journalists all suddenly wanted to speak to an anarchist, and he was the only one most had in their Rolodex, since he was for a while a suspect in the Unabomber case.

My purpose here is not to critique the Primitivist position: this is obviously pointless. It clearly makes no sense to attack any strategy other than waiting for catastrophe, and then deny one is advocating catastrophe. My real point is: if this were a classic ideological position, one should expect the effects to be utterly de-politicizing. If one were really looking forward to industrial collapse or some similar apocalypse, the most obvious course of action would be that followed by right-wing survivalists in the 1980s: take to the woods, dig a bunker, and begin stockpiling canned food and automatic weapons. Or, alternately, perhaps, find a distant island and try to begin reviving stone-age technologies. To my knowledge no proponent of Green Anarchism has ever done anything of either sort. Instead, they tend to act very much like any other anarchist. Primitivists may be more likely to become involved in ecological or animal rights campaigns than in, say, union-organizing, but in New York, for instance, I know ardent Green Anarchists who've worked with the Independent Media Center, in DAN, in video collectives, Food Not Bombs chapters, community gardens, prisoner-support networks, feminist groups, bicycle campaigns, squats, cooperative bookstores, anti-war campaigns, campaigns for the rights of immigrants, housing rights, copwatch programs, and pretty much every other major manifestation of anarchist organizing. Often, in fact, Primitivists turn out to be amongst the most reliable and dedicated activists around.

Confronted with this sort of contradiction, it's hard to avoid asking the same question Evans-Pritchard asked about Zande witchcraft: "how can otherwise reasonable people claim to believe this sort of thing?" If one points out some of these contradictions to actual advocates of Primitivism—for instance, asking them to reflect on what would actually happen if the population of, say, Bangladesh were to one day decide to stop practicing agriculture—the usual reply will be "but it's not a program! It's a critique." Alternately, they might challenge the very logical pragmatic terms of the argument, and insists these are poetic, intuitive understandings about the state of a world that is fundamentally dislocated and wrong. Similarly, even the most avid fans of Zerzan will usually admit, if pressed, that they aren't really in favor of the abolition of language, but instead emphasize the degree to which language can be deceptive, ideological, or mask and occlude more direct forms of experience.

All this, I think, does much to explain the appeal, and the reason Primitivism tends towards such absolutes. It is really an attempt to take absolutely seriously those feelings of utter alienation that drive so many middle-class, white teenagers to anarchism in the first place, and to at least try to imagine a world in which every aspect of that alienation would be totally extinguished. The result can only be a kind of myth. Primitivists will often admit this too, claiming that widespread myths of apocalypse, and of the garden of Eden, are intuitive understandings of real truths: that we once did live in a kind of paradise, that we lost it, and that through a catastrophic collapse of industrial society, we will get it back again. The myth of apocalypse comes to substitute for the faith in revolution. It is, in a way, the same thing, except more absolute: the traditional anarchist rejection of political representation becomes a rejection of representation in any form, even art or language. For most Primitivists, this is what we are mainly dealing with: a comprehensive critique of alienating institutions, and a kind of impossible dream-vision of total liberation that can, if nothing else, provide inspiration and continually remind one why one is in rebellion to begin with. For many, the fact that this makes no sense whatsoever to outsiders is probably a major element in its appeal.

Let me take an apparently very different example. One of the main forms for the dissemination of anarchist ideas in recent years in America have been feminist science fiction novels: from Ursula LeGuin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) to Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993). They operate in a similar way. They are crystallizations of certain tendencies of thought, extrapolations from certain forms of practice, experiments in utopian imagining. The main difference is that since the visions developed in novels are not claiming to be anything but fiction, those who enjoy reading (or writing) them do not tend to claim alternative visions are wrong. In the case of Green Anarchism, the vitriolic quality of so much of the writing seems to result from the confluence of two factors. On the one hand, the urgency of the ecological cause, the sense that the planet is being destroyed and we are all doomed anyway if something isn't done very quickly, and a certain habit of extremely contentious argument inherited from the sectarian Marxist origins of so many of the original participants.[11]

In this, they are unusual. As I mentioned, anarchists have long tended to shun high theory. As David Wieck put it back in 1971 (long before anyone had thought of the term 'postmodernism'):

> Anarchism has always been anti-ideological: anarchists have always insisted on the priority of life and action to theory and system. Subjection to a theory implies, in practice, subjection to an authority (a party) which interprets the theory authoritatively, and this subjection would fatally undermine the intention of creating a society without central political authority. Thus no anarchist writings are authoritative or definitive in the sense that Marx's writings have been regarded by his followers (1971: ix).

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[11] One might say, in fact, that Zerzan's, or Bob Black's, endless blanket denunciations of "Leftism" are themselves an extreme version of one tendency within the very Leftism they condemn.

In fact, most of what serves the same role as theory in anarchism makes some gesture to subvert any possibility of its being used as an authoritative text. Primitivism perhaps most closely resembles a traditional sectarian ideology in trying to vanquish all opposing positions, but its content is palpably fantastic and for the most part could not possibly be reflected in practice. Some visions take the form of novels. Others read like comedy routines. One of the more popular anarchist authors of the 1990s—the inventor, for instance, of the concept of the "Temporary Autonomous Zone"—writes under the persona of Hakim Bey, an insane Ismaili poet with an erotic obsession with young boys, his writings taking the form of communiqués from a non-existent Moorish Orthodox Church.

Bey's mystical pretensions typify another tendency: to identify the space that might otherwise be filled by theory, the transcendental position, as it were, with the sacred, but then to make the sacred ridiculous. I'll be talking about this habit later on when I discuss the role of giant puppets—what might be called the main sacred objects of the movement (but also self-consciously foolish ones). Here, suffice it to say that the relation of anarchism to spirituality has always been complex and ambivalent. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European anarchism always tended to be strongest in countries—Russia, Spain, Italy—with a powerful church, and tended to take on a radically atheist tone, identifying the very notion of God with the principle of hierarchy and unquestioning authority. (So Bakunin's famous phrase "if God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him." There were exceptions—Christian anarchists like Tolstoy—but they were usually not closely related to social movements.) Some have argued that Spanish anarchism, particularly in its rural manifestations, itself took on some of the qualities of a prophetic, millenarian religion (Brenan 1943; cf. Borkenau 1937)—but, if so, it was one whose main rituals involved acts like burning churches, or removing the mummified bodies of nuns from church crypts to reveal the corruption lurking below (Lincoln 1991). In contemporary anarchism this hostility has largely faded away: in part because in many countries, the church has lost so much of its power; in part because so many anarchist allies (indigenous peoples, for example, or in the United States, Quakers, radical priests and ministers) are likely to have come to their politics through religious convictions; in part, too, because of the development of specifically anarchistic forms of spirituality such as feminist paganism. At the same time, specifically anarchist forms of spirituality are—in addition to being inherently pluralistic and open-ended (hence the polytheism)— almost always at least a trifle self-effacing and capable of distance from themselves.[12] Many pagans have a striking ability to see their views as profoundly true, and simultaneously, as a kind of whimsical comedy. Often they seem to be engaging at the same time in a ritual and the parody of a ritual; the point where laughter and self-mockery are likeliest to come into the picture is precisely the point where one approaches the most numinous, unknowable, or profound. The same whimsical, playful quality is reflected in a good deal of pagan feminist literature, as in other branches of anarchist theory, and appears to reflect a sensibility that, at its best, sees "theory" as, if anything, a form of creative writing, both profoundly true because it highlights certain otherwise invisible aspects of reality, but at the same time profoundly foolish, in that it does so by being willingly blind to other aspects.[13] Also, one in which imagination, the ability to create new theories, visions, or anything else, is itself the ultimate, unknowable, sacred thing.

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[12] Barbara Epstein was already puzzling over the phenomenon when discussing the role of feminist spirituality in the direct action movement of the early 1980s—the fact that "many Pagans simultaneously believe in the Goddess as reality and the Goddess as metaphor for the power of human collectivity and human bonds with nature. In the same way, many participants in the direct action movement have simultaneously held naive and sophisticated concepts of

All this is perhaps a bit overstated: the reader should probably not take my own theoretical effusions too much more seriously than those about which I'm writing. The main point, though, is that—unlike some of the "classical" works of Proudhon, Kropotkin, Rocker, Malatesta, De Santillan, and others, written in the shadow of Marxism—contemporary anarchist "theory," such as it is, is most explicitly not intended to provide a comprehensive understanding that will instruct others in the proper conduct of revolution. It is not an ideology, a theory of history. It tends, rather, towards a kind of inspirational, creative play. It is more than anything else an extrapolation from and imaginative projection of certain forms of practice: the experience of working in a small affinity group becomes the model for Primitivist idealizations of the hunter/gatherer band, assumed to be the only social unit for most of human history; the experience of real experiments in worker control becomes the basis for an imaginary planet in a science fiction story; the experience of sisterhood becomes the model for a matriarchal Goddess religion; the experience of a wild moment of collective poetic inspiration or even a particularly good party becomes the basis of a theory of the Temporary Autonomous Zone. Even when contemporary anarchists turn to Marxism, their overwhelming favorite theorists are the Situationists Raoul Vaneigem (1967) and Guy Debord (1967) the Marxist theorists closest to the avant-garde tradition of trying to unify theory, art, and life.

If anarchism is not an attempt to put a certain sort of theoretical vision into practice, but is instead a constant mutual exchange between inspirational visions,

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magical politics" (Epstein 1991:184). By which she means, both the belief that a blockade in itself can shut down a nuclear plant, and that it can raise consciousness and change the public's frameworks of understanding in such a way that it can contribute to its closing. Actually, I've argued elsewhere that this kind of doublethink is typical of magical practice pretty much anywhere, from Madagascar to Nepal (Graeber 2002).

[13] As Bob Black puts it in "The Abolition of Work": "You may be wondering if I'm joking or serious. I'm joking *and* serious."

anti-authoritarian attitudes, and egalitarian practices, it's easy to see how ethnography could become such an appropriate tool for its analysis. This is precisely what ethnography is supposed to do: tease out the implicit logic in a way of life, along with its related myths and rituals, to grasp the sense of a set of practices. Of course, another way of doing so would be simply to follow anarchist debates, as I did at the beginning, since these have tended to center on ethical and organizational questions. Nowadays, these debates center most of all on how to combat racism and sexism in the movement, about forms of decision-making, and questions of violence and nonviolence. Since the last is most immediately relevant to the question of the relation of anarchism and direct action, let me proceed to a brief consideration of the relation between the two, before moving to a capsule history of the role of direct action and direct democracy in North American social movements in the second half of the twentieth century—starting with the 1960s, and ending in the 1990s, at the point where the two began to definitively merge.

III) VIOLENCE AND NONVIOLENCE

The question of violence, nonviolence, and property destruction has haunted anarchism from at least the nineteenth century.

There are obvious reasons why it should be a problem. On the one hand, there are any number of reasons why anarchists might be suspicious of violence. For one thing, anarchists start from the principle that one's mode of resistance should embody the world one wishes to create. Almost no one wishes to create a more violent world. Anarchists try to organize on non-hierarchical lines, and argue that this is not only more just, but more efficient. Violence—particularly aggressive violence—is one of the few forms of human activity that does seem to be more efficient if organized on a top-down, command basis. This, and the concomitant need for secrecy, ensure that the more one prepares for war, or something like it, the more difficult it is to organize democratically.

On the other hand, anarchists wish to see a social revolution and it's hard to imagine how that could happen without any violent conflict whatsoever.

Moreover, they also insist on the moral sovereignty of the individual, and tend to be very uncomfortable with codes of conduct. In principle, it should be for each who resists to decide what is a legitimate act of resistance to an intrinsically illegitimate power. Now, it's important not to overstate things here: in practice, tacit agreements do always exist. CLAC's principle of "diversity of tactics," about which we heard so much in earlier chapters, might have sounded like "anything goes" to pacifists like SalAMI, but it was premised on a shared understanding that no one was about to show up with firearms or explosives. That would have been simply unthinkable. If my experience is anything to go by, if anyone had even suggested doing so, they would immediately have been assumed to be a police infiltrator for that very reason. Nonetheless, such tacit understandings exist only amongst activists. If outsiders join in, one can never be quite sure what they are going to do. In Québec, for instance, there was a scare-story going around the Black Bloc at one point during the actions that "French gangbangers" were going to show up at the wall with firearms (an act which they assumed would be automatically blamed on them). In Seattle, the Black Bloc's carefully targeted destruction of corporate targets was, in a few cases, followed by episodes of opportunistic looting by local African-American teenagers. In that case, it's unlikely any in the Bloc objected. To see oppressed communities rise up and join you is, in a way, the whole point. And, as in St. Jean Baptiste, that oppressed community's standards for acceptable tactics might well be different than your own. However, most large mobilizations (including Québec City) also see at least a few minor episodes of what I call "the drunken frat boy problem"—opportunistic violence, mainly for the fun of it, on the part of young people whose politics are likely to have nothing to do with the activists', or even be explicitly right wing. In Europe, this can actually be encouraged by police, providing an excuse for repressive measures. The most extreme example of this came in Genoa, when police apparently let it be known they would turn a blind eye to this sort of thing, and fascists and soccer hooligans from all over Europe descended on the place.

Still, Genoa was extreme and this is usually a fairly minor problem. The worst moral dilemma for anarchists tends to come when isolated individuals, claiming anarchist inspiration, do something genuinely violent. Again, the anarchists who assassinated heads of state around the turn of the last century are probably the most dramatic example. The fascinating thing about such cases is that the majority of such assassinations were conducted by isolated individuals, not people active in actual anarchist organizations. Many had only the vaguest idea what anarchist principles were. However, if one takes the principle of moral autonomy seriously, it's difficult to treat such acts as completely illegitimate. From an anarchist perspective, insofar as it is legitimate to engage in any act of interpersonal violence, heads of state, major capitalists, or high officials are clearly the most legitimate targets. To instead adopt a more conventional guerilla war strategy, form a small army and attack police stations or army posts—thus trying to kill a bunch of ordinary people who are in no sense directly responsible for the policies one objected to—would clearly be far more problematic. (Actually, it's hard to deny that, by any moral standards, assassination is far superior to war.) On the other hand, since heads of state tend to find this kind of logic highly objectionable, the results are invariably disastrous. Anarchist writers like Peter Kropotkin or Emma Goldman, mainly concerned with disseminating anarchist ideas before a broader public, often struggled painfully with what to do or say about such people. Is it legitimate to condemn them? What sort of solidarity does one owe them? Does one not at least have the responsibility to explain to the world their point of view? Debates over broken windows and property destruction, or the possibility of molotovs in Québec City, are simply more recent versions of the same thing.

Activists who have been on the scene even only as long as two or three years tend to complain about the need to constantly reinvent the wheel in such matters. Every time there's a major action, everyone has to go through exactly the same debates. Some will argue that confrontational tactics or property destruction will only make activists look bad in the eyes of the public. Others will argue that the corporate media wouldn't make us look good whatever we do. Some will argue that if you smash a Starbucks window, that will be the only story on the news, effectively freezing out any consideration of issues; others will reply that if there's no property destruction, there won't be any story at all. Some will claim confrontational tactics deprive activists of the moral high ground; others will accuse those people of being elitist, and insist that the violence of the system is so overwhelming that to refuse to confront it effectively is itself acquiescence to violence. Some will argue that militant tactics endanger nonviolent protesters; others will insist that unless one creates some sort of peace police to physically threaten anyone who spraypaints or breaks a window, some will probably do so, and if so, coordinating with the militants rather than isolating them is much safer for all concerned. In the end, one almost invariably ends up with the same resolution: that as long as no one is actually attacking another human being, the important thing is to maintain solidarity. The last thing you want is to end up in a situation like Seattle, where you actually had pacifists physically assaulting anarchists trying to break windows, or turning them in to the police. Many remark that the conclusion is so inevitable that one wishes it was possible to simply fast-forward the debate, but, as many will resignedly remark, it seems each time a major action rolls along, those newly brought into the movement have to work all these things out for themselves.

One result though is a kind of constant paradox within anarchism. It's not that one cannot find pacifist anarchists. Quite a number of pacifists do see themselves as anarchists. Those contemporary anarchists who are not pacifists, however, tend to avoid any association with pacifism, and in fact are likely to react to mention of the word with vigorous condemnation—despite the fact that, in the larger perspective, their ideas and practices emerged much more from that tradition than from any other. One would be hard-pressed to find an anarchist whose instinct would not be to place himself more on the side of Malcolm X than with Martin Luther King or Gandhi; however, the fact remains that in terms of overall approach, Gandhi's "become the change you want to see" seems a thousand times more in keeping with the anarchist spirit than Malcolm X's "by all means necessary"—and Gandhi himself recognized a strong philosophical affinity of his own ideas and anarchism, which Malcolm X certainly did not. "By all means necessary," in fact, seems an awful lot like the very ends-justifies-the-means logic which anarchism has consistently rejected. Yet practical annoyances with pacifists, combined with the inevitable instinct to identify with the most radical option, tends to ensure that almost invariably, the anarchist will nonetheless identify with Malcolm X.

Most anarchists nowadays, for example, are fond of citing arguments like Native American activist Ward Churchill's *Pacifism as Pathology* (1998), that pacifism itself is mainly a way for white liberals to feel good about themselves, that genuinely oppressed groups do not have such luxuries, and that apparent exceptions—the victories of Gandhi or King—were really only made possible by their opponent's fear of more violent alternatives. (The fact that authors like Churchill also tend to reject anarchist critiques of hierarchy in favor of military-style leadership tends to go unremarked, or written off as inessential.)[14] The fact that Churchill is Native American, however, is significant. In fact, very few North American anarchists would themselves go far beyond breaking a window; almost all scrupulously avoid harming others in any way. As I occasionally point out to journalists, it's hard not to find constant references to Black Bloc anarchists as "violent" amusing when one has spent any time with them, and observes them, for instance, carefully avoiding stepping on worms or debating about whether it's really justifiable to kill a mosquito. The real point of fracture comes, precisely, when it comes to issues of solidarity. To take a consistently nonviolent position, one would have to, for example, tell the Zapatistas in Chiapas that they shouldn't really have conducted an armed insurrection—however brief—or the Black Panthers that a bunch of middle-class white anarchists had more authority to tell them what sort of tactics to employ than they did. This dichotomy—between community-building (in which anarchists have everything in common with pacifists) and solidarity with oppressed groups—is a constant dilemma that will come up throughout this book.

It is interesting to observe that historically, anarchism has thrived as a revolutionary movement most of all in times of peace, and in largely demilitarized societies. As Eric Hobsbawm has noted (1973:61), during the latter years of the nineteenth century, when most Marxist parties were rapidly becoming reformist social democrats, it was anarchism that stood at the center of the revolutionary Left.[15]

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[14] At least, the author remembers Ward Churchill doing so when questioned by anarchists in a forum in 2002. Others—notably my editor, Charles—tell me he has since moderated his views on such matters.

[15] "In 1905–1914, the Marxist Left had in most countries been on the fringe of the revolutionary movement, the main body of Marxists had been identified with a de facto non-revolutionary social democracy, while the bulk of the revolutionary left was anarcho-syndicalist, or

Things only really changed with World War I and, of course, after the Russian revolution. The conventional historiography assumes it was the creation of the Soviet Union that led to the decline of anarchism and catapulted Communism everywhere to the fore. Still, it seems to me one could look at this another way. In the late nineteenth century most people honestly believed that war between industrialized powers was becoming obsolete. By 1900, even the use of passports was considered an antiquated barbarism. While colonial adventures were always a constant, a war between, say, England and France seemed about as unthinkable as it would today. The "short twentieth century" (which appears to have begun in 1914 and ended sometime around 1989 or 1991) was, by contrast, probably the most violent in human history. It was a century in which major powers were continually preoccupied with either waging world wars or preparing for them. Hardly surprising, then, that anarchism might come to seem unrealistic. The creation and maintenance of huge mechanized killing machines does seem to be the one thing that anarchists can never, by definition, be very good at. Neither is it surprising that Marxist parties (already organized on a command structure, and for whom the organization of huge mechanized killing machines often proved about the only thing they were particularly good at) began to seem eminently practical and realistic in comparison. It makes perfect sense, then, that the moment the Cold War ended and violent conflict between industrialized powers again came to seem unthinkable, anarchism popped right back to where it had been at the end of the nineteenth century: an international movement at the very center of the revolutionary left. The surprising thing was that it happened almost instantly.

What's more, one could make a case that the effectiveness of more militant anarchist tactics tend to depend on the effective demilitarization of society. Consider here the battles over squats in Germany or Italy, or even the battles surrounding the expansion of Narita airport in Japan, in which anarchists or their local equivalents were able to fight pitched battles with police, defend territory with clubs and stones against tear gas and water cannons, and as often as not, were actually allowed to win. It's hard to think of anything remotely like this happening in the United States. In America, the police simply will not allow themselves to lose. If they decide to move in on a squat in force, that squat will be lost; the only reason to defend it is to make the police's job so difficult that they will hesitate before attacking other squats in the future. It's not just because American society is far more heavily policed; it's also because Germany, Italy, and Japan—all, significantly, former Axis powers—have been so effectively demilitarized. Stand-up battles with the police are only possible in societies in which everyone, including the public, is aware that almost no one owns firearms,

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at least much closer to the ideas and the mood of anarcho-syndicalism than to that of classical Marxism" (Hobsbawm 1973:61).

and therefore, police tactics appropriate to a society where most criminals can be assumed to be heavily armed—for example SWAT teams—seem wildly inappropriate. And certainly, in those parts of Europe where firearms and military know-how is much more broadly available (one thinks of Russia, Albania, the former Yugoslavia, or for that matter Iraq) classical anarchism and anarchist tactics do not find nearly as fertile ground.

Curiously, the real inspiration for the kind of tactics employed in the current wave of globalization protests comes from movements in parts of the Global South which had not, until recently, really been able to engage in nonviolent direct action at all. People's Global Action, which put out the call for Seattle, was founded on the initiative of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas. The Zapatista movement, it seems to me, can best be seen as an attempt by people who have historically been denied the right to nonviolent, civil resistance to seize it; essentially, to call the bluff of neoliberalism and its pretenses to democratization and yielding power to "civil society." It is, as its commanders say, an army that aspires not to be an army any more. Since their initial, three-week insurrection in January 1994, it has also become about the least violent "army" imaginable (it's something of an open secret that, for the last five years at least, they have not even been carrying real guns). The EZLN is the sort of army that organizes "invasions" of Mexican military bases in which hundreds of rebels sweep in entirely unarmed to scream at and try to shame the resident soldiers. The other two key founding members of PGA were the KRRS, a Gandhian peasant movement in India, and the MST, or Landless Peasants Movement, in Brazil. The latter have gained an enormous moral authority in Brazil by nonviolent mass actions aimed at reoccupying unused lands entirely nonviolently. As with the Zapatistas, it's pretty clear that, if the same people had tried the same thing twenty years ago, they would simply have been mowed down. The most radical movements in South America today, in fact, tend to be about as nonviolent as they think they can get away with: most will, like the militants in Québec City, limit themselves to throwing rocks, and then normally against fully armored riot police, but would never dream of using firearms. The situation is complicated because in many parts of Latin America there is, and has long been, a much richer tradition of nonviolent direct action than in either Europe or North America, but the globalization movement's immediate inspiration seems to come primarily from groups that, twenty or thirty years ago, would almost certainly have been forced to resort to guerilla warfare, but who, having watched so many earlier guerilla movements destroy themselves, or degenerate into nihilist gangsters, have chosen instead to take a radically different approach. In moving away from military tactics they often also ended up—often rather despite themselves—moving towards much more anarchistic forms of organization.

IV) AN EXTREMELY BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RELATION BETWEEN DIRECT ACTION AND DIRECT DEMOCRACY IN THE US SINCE 1960

Before World War II, the main locus of direct action in North America was as I mentioned the labor movement. The period since the war has seen a gradual merging of the traditions of direct action and of direct democracy, with the two only really coming together in the late 1970s and early 1980s, ready to be revived by the influence of the Zapatistas. The story is very complicated but a caricature version might run something like this:

The 1960s New Left kicked off with a call for "participatory democracy" in the famous Port Huron Statement of 1962, a founding document of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Its principle author, Tom Hayden, was inspired ultimately by John Dewey and C. Wright Mills and the document was notable for calling for a broad democratization of all aspects of American society, to create a situation where people are making for themselves the "decisions that affect their lives."[16] One might see this as a very anarchistic vision, but SDS, as its inception, had a very different orientation. Actually, their original political program was to radicalize the Democratic Party (they only abandoned it when placed in an impossible position by the Democrats' continual pursuit of the Vietnam War). Even more crucially, those who framed the statement seemed to have only the sketchiest ideas of what "participatory democracy" might mean in practice. This is most evident in the contradictory character of SDS's own structure. As Francesca Polletta (2002) has pointed out, SDS was on paper a quite formal, top-down organization, with a central steering committee and meetings run according to Robert's Rules of Order. In practice, it was made up of largely autonomous cells that operated by a kind of crude, de facto consensus process. The emphasis on consensus, in turn, appears to have been inspired by the example of SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the student wing of the civil rights movement. SNCC had originally been created on the initiative of Anita Baker and a number of other activists who had been involved in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), who were hoping to create an alternative to SCLC's top-down structure and charismatic leadership (embodied, of course, in the figure of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.). Famous for organizing lunch-table sit-ins, freedom rides, and other direct actions, SNCC was organized on a thoroughly decentralized basis, with ideas for new projects expected to emerge from individual chapters, all of which operated by a kind of rough-and-ready consensus.

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[16] Hayden's more immediate inspiration was his former philosophy teacher Arnold Kaufman at University of Michigan.

This emphasis on consensus is a bit surprising, since at the time there was very little model for it. In both SNCC and SDS, it appears to have emerged from a feeling that, since no one should be expected to do anything against their will, decisions should really be unanimous. However, there doesn't seem to have been anything like what's now called "consensus process" in the formal sense of the term. The problem was there was no obvious model. The only communities in North America with a living tradition of consensus decision-making (the Quakers, and various Native American groups) were either unknown, unavailable, or uninterested in proselytizing. Quakers at the time tended to see consensus essentially as a religious practice; they were, according to Polletta (2002:195), actually fairly resistant to the idea of teaching it to anyone else.

The New Left was, as we all know, essentially a campus movement. Paul Mattick Jr. (1970) has argued that the wave of 1960s activism seems to have emerged from a kind of social bottleneck. The welfare state ideal of the time had been to defuse class tensions by offering a specter of perpetual social mobility (in much the same way the frontier had once done). After the war, there was a very conscious effort on the part of the government to pump resources into the higher education system, which began to expand exponentially, along with the number of working-class children attending university. The problem, of course, is that such growth curves invariably hit their limits, and, as any Third World government that has attempted this strategy has learned, when they do, the results are typically explosive. By the 1960s, this was starting to happen. Millions of students were left without any realistic prospect of finding jobs that bore any relation to their real expectations or capacities—a normal prospect in industrial societies, actually, but suddenly hugely exacerbated. These were the students who first became involved in SDS; people who, as Mattick emphasizes, like their equivalents in the Global South, always saw themselves as a kind of breakaway fragment of the administrative elite. This was, he suggests, crucial to understanding the limits of the New Left—that activists invariably saw themselves as "organizers," social workers:[17]

> What united all factions of the left was the conception of their relationship to actual or fantasized communities as organizers—after the example of trade

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[17] Demographic studies (eg, Flacks 1971; Mankoff and Flacks 1971) tended to show that in the early years of SDS, the movement was largely composed of liberal arts students in elite universities, from affluent, Left or Left-leaning professional families: i.e., children of doctors, lawyers, teachers rather than businessmen; children of successful immigrant families rather than members of the old-money elite. However, after SDS expanded in the late 1960s the social base became much broader, and began to include many students of working-class backgrounds as well. As we'll see, this latter pattern is basically the one that always recurs in revolutionary movements: a convergence of alienated and rebellious children of the professional classes with frustrated but upwardly mobile children of the working class with some experience of higher education.

> unionists and social workers—rather than as "fellow students" or workers with a particular understanding of a situation shared with others, and ideas of what to do about it. Despite the disagreement over the primary target for organizing—unemployed, blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, dropout youth—in each case the "community" was seen as a potential "constituency" (or, in PL's [Progressive Labor Party] language, "base"). The radicals saw themselves as professional revolutionaries, a force so to speak outside of society, organising those inside on their own behalf. Thus the activist played the part reserved in liberal theory for the state, a point not to be neglected in the attempt to understand the drift of the New Left from an orientation of liberal governmental reform to Leninist-Stalinist concepts of socialism (Mattick 1970: 22).

The contradictions of this situation eventually became apparent as the decade wore on. The crisis was sparked first in groups like SNCC, when demands for civil rights began to give way to calls for Black Power. The radicals in SNCC, who were eventually to found the Black Panthers, called on white activists to stop doing alliance work and return to their own communities, particularly, in order to organize white communities against racism. SDS activists always greeted such calls with great ambivalence (Barber 2001)—in part because they were never quite clear on what their own communities were supposed to be. One could say something along these lines had been attempted in the early 1960s with the Economic Research Areas Project (ERAP), intended as the white equivalent to grassroots civil rights organizing, that brought SDS activists into poor white communities, and tried to mobilize communities around matters of common concern. Some of these projects scored victories in gaining local reforms, but organizers never felt much part of the communities in which they worked, felt isolated from other activists, and few saw the results as worth the sacrifice. The project fell apart in 1965. Instead, as Mattick so keenly observed, many began to realize that if there was a way to overcome the alienation of dead-end jobs, to find work that actually lived up to their imaginative capacities, it was in activism itself. Other activists, in effect, *were* their communities.

The crisis initiated by Black Power ultimately led in two very different directions. Again, at the cost of gross simplification: once their allies in the civil rights movement had abandoned them, white activists were effectively left with two options. They could either try to build countercultural institutions of their own, or they could focus on allying with communities or revolutionary groups in struggle overseas: i.e., the Viet Cong or other Third World revolutionaries, who would take pretty much whatever allies they could get. As SDS began to splinter into squabbling Maoist factions, groups like the Diggers and Yippies (founded in 1968) took the first option. Many were explicitly anarchist, and certainly, the late 1960s turn towards the creation of autonomous collectives and institution-building was squarely within the anarchist tradition, while the emphasis on free love, psychedelic drugs, and the creation of alternative forms of pleasure was squarely in the bohemian tradition with which Euro-American anarchism has always been at least somewhat aligned. The Yippie slogan, "revolution for the hell of it" could be seen as emerging directly from the realization that activism itself could become the prime means of overcoming alienation. The other option was to see oneself as primarily allying with revolutionary communities overseas: hence the obsession with glorifying revolutionary heroes in Cuba, Vietnam, China, and elsewhere (men who, as Situationist and Autonomist critics pointed out, were essentially icons of the sort of new radical administration elites with which the SDS had always tacitly identified), and the feeling one need strike back against the empire from within the belly of the beast.

Each strategy involved a return to direct action, but, simultaneously, a jettisoning of the whole project of creating egalitarian decision-making structures. Hippies and Yippies might be considered a bit ambivalent in this regard, as small communes and many alternative institutions created in the process generally did operate on democratic principles. Still, the Yippies, with their wild, acid-inspired pranks and media stunts, tended to turn into a platform for charismatic impresarios like Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, in a style that proved notoriously alienating to some members of the white working classes. The Weathermen, in turn, attempted a series of bombings directed at military and corporate targets, meant to inspire spontaneous emulation and drive society towards a revolutionary confrontation—though with the significant limitation that they did not want to kill anyone. They ended up mainly blowing up empty buildings. Interestingly, both had a profound effect on later media policy, since mainstream journalists began to feel complicit, coming to the conclusion that increasingly wild and destructive acts were in fact inspired by a need to constantly escalate in order to make headlines. I have heard persistent rumors from 1960s veterans, for example, that the Weathermen's bombing campaign was far more extensive and devastating than has ever been recorded, but that there was a conscious decision by the national media to stop reporting on it. I have no idea if this is true. Still, one thing that is clear is that, since this period, the American media has become, more than that of any other industrial democracy I'm aware of, extremely reluctant to report on activist stunts of any sort—or even demonstrations.

This point will become important later on. For now, though, the key point is that none of these groups combined their interest in direct action with an emphasis on decentralized decision-making; to the contrary, whether because the focus turned on the one hand to charismatic figures who were at least potential media stars, or to the kind of cell-like, military structure able to carry out guerilla-style attacks, the impulse was in the other direction. Moreover, both strategies flared up for a few years and very rapidly faded away (though the alternative institutions created around this time often lasted considerably longer).

It has become a conventional habit in liberal scholarship to contrast the serious activism of the early 1960s New Left with the supposed childish extremism of the late 1960s and early 1970s. I don't want to leave the reader with the impression I agree with this. The standard liberal complaint is that the 1960s counterculture—in effect, the first mass-based, industrial bohemianism—destroyed itself in ultra-radicalism. Moreover, in doing so, the argument goes, it left an opening for right-wing activists to adopt many of the same grassroots organizing techniques developed by SDS to reach out to the very white working-class constituencies SDS had such a difficult time organizing, to mobilize them against that very counterculture. There's certainly an irony here. But it seems to me it is better to see both periods as attempts to work through certain fundamental dilemmas that are still with us today. I myself suspect the real culprit in the rise and eventual hegemony of the New Right is not the excesses of Maoists and Yippies, but, rather, the fact that America stopped using higher education as a means of class mobility. As most of Mattick's frustrated administrative classes were reabsorbed into a new, more flexible capitalism, the white working class was increasingly locked out of any access to the means of cultural production—other than, perhaps, their church. The result was a perhaps predictable resentment against the supposed countercultural excesses of the "liberal elite."[18]

Be this as it may, the second period was far more complex and creative than critics are usually willing to let on. Many of the ideas that came out of it were extraordinarily prescient. Consider, for example, Huey Newton's notion of "intercommunality," which became the official Black Panther position in 1971, and which held that the nation-state was in the process of breaking down as the main stage of political struggle and that any effective revolutionary politics would have to begin by an alliance between local self-organized communities irrespective of national boundaries. The real problem was *how* they were self-organized: the Black Panthers, as typified by figures like Newton himself, eventually came to embody an era in which macho, chauvinist leadership styles themselves came to seem synonymous with militancy.

It's probably significant that in SNCC, the first move towards rejecting decentralized decision-making was initiated by the emerging Black Power faction. Poletta's (2002) careful analysis of the organizational history of the movement shows quite clearly that consensus and decentralization were not challenged because they were actually inefficient. Rather, they were used as wedge issues. By obsessing about democratic process, white activists in SNCC and their allies could be identified with endless talk and fussing about; the more militant, Black Power faction could present itself as the ideal model of the ruthless efficiency appropriate to a truly militant organization. It's probably also significant that Stokely Carmichael, who became the main spokesman for the Black Power position, was fond of saying things like "the only position for women in SNCC is prone."

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[18] In fact, those constituencies that most reliably continue to vote Democratic are precisely those who have some hope of mobility through education: immigrants, African-Americans, even women, who are at this point attending university at far higher rates than men. There is certainly no parallel in communities of color to the explicit anti-intellectualism of so much of the radical Right.

The fact that, even by the mid 1960s, such things could be said in an organization that was originally founded by a woman as a revolt against charismatic male authority is itself astounding. But it might give a sense of the sexual politics always lying not far below the surface of the old New Left. Militant nationalist movements are of course notorious for providing platforms for the vigorous reassertion of certain types of masculine authority. But sentiments similar to Carmichael's can be found coming from the mouths of white activists of that time as well. The feminist movement, in fact, began largely from within the New Left, as a reaction to precisely this sort of macho leadership style—or simply among those tired of discovering that, even during university occupations, they were still expected to prepare sandwiches and provide free sexual services while male activists posed for the cameras. The revival of interest in creating practical forms of direct democracy, in turn—in fact, the real origin of the current movement—thus trace back less to these male 1960s radicals than to the women's movement that arose largely in reaction to them (for example, Freeman 1971, Evans 1979).

When the feminist movement began, it was organizationally very simple. Its basic units were small consciousness-raising circles; the approach was informal, intimate, and anti-ideological. Most of the first groups emerged directly from New Left circles. Insofar as they placed themselves in relation to a previous radical tradition, it was usually anarchism. While the informal organization proved extremely well suited for consciousness-raising, as groups turned to planning actions, and particularly as they grew larger, problems tended to develop. Almost invariably, such groups came to be dominated by an "inner circle" of women who were, or had become, close friends. The nature of the inner circle would vary, but somehow one would always emerge. As a result, in some groups lesbians would end up feeling excluded, in others the same thing would happen to straight women. Other groups would grow rapidly in size and then see most of the newcomers quickly drop out again as there was no way to integrate them. Endless debates ensued. One result was an essay called "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," written by Mary Jo Freeman in 1970 and first published in 1972—a text still avidly read by organizers of all sorts in the present day. Freeman's argument is fairly simple. No matter how sincere one's dedication to egalitarian principles, the fact is that in any activist group, different members will have different skills, abilities, experience, personal qualities, and levels of dedication. As a result, some sort of elite or leadership structure will inevitably develop. In a lot of ways, having an unacknowledged leadership structure, she argued, can be a lot more damaging than having a formal one: at least with a formal structure it's possible to establish precisely what's expected of those who are doing the most important, coordinative tasks and hold them accountable.

One reason for the essay's ongoing popularity is that it can be used to support such a wide variety of positions. Liberals and socialists regularly cite "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" as a justification for why any sort of anarchist organization is bound to fail, as a charter for a return to older, top-down styles of organization, replete with executive offices, steering committees, and the like. Egalitarians object that even to the extent this is true, it is far worse to have a leadership that feels fully entitled to its power than one that has to take accusations of hypocrisy seriously. Anarchists, therefore, have usually read Freeman's argument as a call to formalize group process to ensure greater equality, and, in fact, most of her concrete suggestions—clarifying what tasks are assigned to what individuals, finding a way for the group to review those individuals' performance, distributing responsibilities as widely as possible (perhaps by rotation), ensuring all have equal access to information and resources—were clearly meant to precisely that end.

Within the larger feminist movement itself, most of these arguments eventually became moot, because the anarchist moment was brief. Especially after *Roe v. Wade* made it seem strategically wise to rely on government power, the women's movement was to take off in a decisively liberal direction, and to rely increasingly on organizational forms that were anything but egalitarian. But, for those still working in egalitarian collectives, or trying to create them, feminism had effectively framed the terms of debate. If you want to keep decision making to the smallest groups possible, how do those groups coordinate? Within those groups, how to prevent a clique of friends from taking over? How to prevent certain categories of participants (straight women, gay women, older women, students—in mixed groups it soon became, simply, women) from being marginalized? What's more, even if mainstream feminists had abandoned the politics of direct action, there were plenty of radical feminists, not to mention anarchafeminists, around to try to keep such groups honest.

The origins of the current direct-action movement go back precisely to attempts to resolve those dilemmas. The pieces really started coming together in the antinuclear movement of the late 1970s, first with the founding of the Clamshell Alliance and the occupation of the Shoreham nuclear power plant in Massachusetts in 1977, then followed by the Abalone Alliance and struggles over the Diablo Canyon plant in California a few years later. The main inspiration for antinuclear activists—at least on questions of organization—were ideas propounded by a group called the Movement for a New Society (MNS), based in Philadelphia. MNS was spearheaded by a gay rights activist named George Lakey, who—like several other members of the group—was also an anarchist Quaker. Lakey and his friends proposed a vision of nonviolent revolution. Rather than a cataclysmic seizure of power, they proposed the continual creation and elaboration of new institutions, based on new, non-alienating modes of interaction—institutions that could be considered "prefigurative" insofar as they provided a foretaste of what a truly democratic society might be like. Such prefigurative institutions could gradually replace the existing social order (Lakey 1973). The vision in itself was hardly new. It was a nonviolent version of the standard anarchist idea of building a new society within the shell of the old. What was new was that men like Lakey, having been brought up Quakers, and acquired a great deal of experience with Quaker decision-making processes, had a practical vision of how some of these alternatives might actually work. Many of what have now become standard features of formal consensus process—the principle that the facilitator should never act as an interested party in the debate, the idea of the "block"—were first disseminated by MNS trainings in Philadelphia and Boston.

The antinuclear movement was also the first to make its basic organizational unit the affinity group—a kind of minimal unit of organization first developed by anarchists in early twentieth-century Spain and Latin America—and spokescouncils. As Starhawk pointed out in Chapter 1, all this was very much a learning process, a kind of blind experiment, and things were often extremely rocky. At first, organizers were such consensus purists that they insisted that any one individual had the right to block proposals even on a nationwide level, which proved entirely unworkable. Still, direct action proved spectacularly successful in putting the issue of nuclear power on the map. If anything, the movement fell victim to its own success. Though it rarely won a battle—that is, for a blockade to prevent the construction of any particular new plant—it very quickly won the war. US government plans to build a hundred new generators were scotched after a couple years and no new plans to build nuclear plants have been announced since. Attempts to move from nuclear plants to nuclear missiles and, from there, to a social revolution, however, proved more of a challenge, and the movement itself was never able to jump from the nuclear issue to become the basis of a broader revolutionary campaign. After the early 1980s, it largely disappeared.

This is not to say nothing was going on in the late 1980s and 1990s. Radical AIDS activists working with ACT UP, and radical environmentalists with groups like Earth First!, kept these techniques alive and developed them. In the 1990s,

CHAPTER 6

SOME NOTES ON “ACTIVIST CULTURE”

I started this book with the first CLAC tour that passed through New York in early 2000. Let me flash forward about a year and talk about the second CLAC tour to do so: one held prior to their “Take the Capital” action in Ottawa during the 2002 G8 meetings in Kananaskis.

The audience for such tours tended to consist mostly of white anarchists, but this time the CLAC people made a point of bringing in at least one speaker from a local community-based group in each city they passed through. In New York, this turned out to be an organizer named Ranjanit from a radical South Asian group called Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM). At that time, DRUM had earned enormous respect in New York activist circles for its work on immigration detention issues—of special interest there in the immediate wake of September 11, when hundreds of people of Middle Eastern or South Asian descent had been swept up and effectively disappeared.

The speakers from Canada described campaigns they’d been involved with, and talked about organizing dilemmas of one sort or another. Ranjanit’s talk was different. It consisted mainly of a condemnation of “activist culture.” He himself, he kept emphasizing, was not only of Indian descent but a working-class kid from Queens. He knew something about the communities with which he was working. Since Seattle, all anarchists have been talking about has been how to move away from “summit hopping” to working more closely with communities in struggle. The problem, he emphasized, was that they had developed their own styles of dress, mannerisms, ways of talking, tastes in music and food—a kind of hybrid mishmash of hippie, punk, and mainstream middle-class white culture, with incorporated chunks of more exotic revolutionary traditions—and this made it almost impossible for them to communicate with anyone outside their own little charmed circle. Some elements of this activist culture—the rejection of personal hygiene standards, for instance—were considered downright offensive by most of those with whom they wished to form alliances. Others, like the vegan diets, made it impossible to sit down at the table with almost anyone who was not already an activist. Activist culture was choking the promise of the movement, and anarchists had to make up their mind what they really wanted to do: create a (tiny, relatively privileged) community of their own, show up at IMF meetings and make grand declarations about the evils of global capitalism, or make a serious effort to work with real communities who were actually bearing the brunt of capitalist globalization.

You can't be an anarchist in a big city in America without hearing some version of this critique on a fairly regular basis. In part, this is because it's a critique that needs to be made. Much like the SDS activists described in the last chapter, few white participants in the direct action movement see themselves as coming from "cultures"; most see themselves simply as generic ("unmarked") Americans, the kind whose issues and concerns are treated as universal, even if at the same time, they feel there is something about that generic American way of life that is deeply inhuman, unsustainable, and wrong. As anarchists and revolutionaries, therefore, they are faced with the same dilemma: whether to try to create an alternative culture of their own, or to concentrate on alliance work, supporting the struggles of those who suffer most under the existing system, but who are also willing to work with them as allies. To put it crudely: they have to choose between whether to focus on their own alienation or others' oppression.

Certainly, in reality, almost everyone ends up doing a little of both. But this is precisely what leads to exactly the contradictions Ranjanit was pointing to. The more one creates one's own, alternative culture, the more bizarre and outlandish one seems to outsiders, including those with whom one ostensibly wishes to ally. Many people of color see anarchist culture itself as a badge of white privilege being waved in their faces (as one African-American anarchist remarked, in regard to punk styles of dress and comportment, "If I went out on the street looking like that I'd be dragged down to the cop shop in fifteen minutes"). On the other hand, it seems unreasonable to ask anarchists to abandon all attempts to build an alternative culture, to fall back on a way of life they hate, just so as not to put others off.

But can one really be *against* a culture?

This is the question I want to explore in this chapter. "Culture" is a term with such universally positive associations nowadays, it's already slightly odd to hear that the fact that certain people have a culture is treated as a problem. All the more so, when the culture in question is born from a conscious effort to create a less hierarchical, less alienated, and more democratic and ecologically sustainable form of life—to create the kind of culture that might befit a genuinely free society. It seems to me unraveling this paradox will bring us to the core of the fundamental dilemmas of the anarchist project.

Dilemmas of White Privilege

Most often, activist culture is seen as problematic—as it was for Ranjanit—because it is seen as a form of white privilege, and arguments about activist culture are framed in terms of race. America's racial divisions have, of course, been the scourge of radical politics in the United States for centuries. Historically, they have made the maintenance of ongoing class-based alliances extraordinarily difficult. Arguments like these regularly rip direct-action groups apart.

Let me consider one particularly well-documented example. In the 1990s, the Love & Rage Federation (Filipo 1993) dissolved over issues of white privilege. Love & Rage had begun as an initiative to create a continental anarchist network around a newspaper of the same name. In many ways it was quite successful. After ten years, however, they found themselves stubbornly unable to expand beyond their original core of middle-class white activists or include significant numbers of people of color.[1] Furious arguments ultimately broke out over the reasons for this: which also became theoretical debates about the nature of white privilege and ways of overcoming white supremacy.

Some argued that the problem was cultural. The vast majority of white anarchists first discovered anarchism through punk rock and its DIY culture. Walk into a typical anarchist infoshop, they pointed out, and you will almost inevitably be greeted by people with green hair and facial piercings. It doesn't matter how welcoming they were: their very appearance obviously limited the appeal of such places to members of the white working class, let alone poor people of color. Others argued that the problem lay much deeper. The US, they argued, is a nation built on white supremacy, and whiteness is not a culture. When white people talk about their cultural heritage they talk about being German, or Irish, or Lithuanian, but never about whiteness. That's because whiteness is a category of privilege, a tacit agreement with others categorized as "white"—from home loan associations or police superintendents—to provide aid and protection that is not provided to those not so classified. The only way to destroy the system of privilege is to subvert the category of whiteness, so as to ultimately destroy it.

This was a position being developed in circles surrounding the journal *Race Traitor*, which was launched around this time and avidly read in activist circles. Its motto was "Treason to Whiteness Is Loyalty to Humanity." This was a very appealing notion, but the obvious question then became: how does one actually do that? How does one become an effective race traitor? Who might be an example of an effective role model? Many in Love & Rage found inspiration in the example of Subcomandante Marcos, the famous masked spokesman of the Mexican Zapatistas. Marcos was originally a middle-class Mexican who led a group of mostly privileged urban revolutionaries to organize indigenous communities in Chiapas and, after ten years in the jungle, came to abandon his vanguardist ideology in order to become an agent carrying out decisions made by the indigenous communities. In his willingness to step back and accept the leadership of oppressed communities, he could be considered an example of a genuine race traitor. But Marcos, for his part, had the advantage of being able to ally with indigenous communities that already acted very much like anarchists, with their own style of consensus-based direct democracy. What did this mean for anarchists in the United States, where most revolutionary groups based in communities of color were far more hierarchically organized—where, in fact, many saw emphases on direct democracy as itself a form of white privilege? Would all this mean having to abandon any idea of building a new society in the shell of the old? Or, at least, of white anarchists playing any significant role in the process of doing so? Within a year or two, Love & Rage split into feuding factions over racial issues, and the entire project ultimately foundered.

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[1] They did acquire a Mexican chapter, Amor y Rabia. But its members were also largely middle-class in origin.

Similar debates erupted in the early days of the globalization movement. In this case the kick-off was a piece called "Where Was the Color in Seattle?" (Martinez 2000), that sparked continual arguments about the nature of racial privilege, outreach versus alliance models, about how to accept the leadership of communities of color, and about the stifling effects of white guilt. The overwhelmingly white make-up of the emerging movement was felt to be a continual crisis. Certainly this was true of New York City Direct Action Network, originally founded to help coordinate the actions against the IMF and World Bank in Washington on April 16, 2000. DAN's second major initiative was to help organize actions against the Republican Convention in Philadelphia that summer. In order to do so, a group of DAN organizers proposed to ally with SLAM,[2] a radical student group based at Hunter College with a much more diverse membership, and several other POC-based organizations. In those days in the immediate wake of Seattle, everyone was eager to learn DAN's tactics and forms of organization, so the latter were not averse; but they also insisted that the actions themselves focus on the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal (the Black activist and journalist then on death row in Philadelphia) and more broadly on the US Prison Industrial Complex, and racist nature of the criminal justice system. These demands isolated a significant faction in DAN who had seen the convention protests as a chance to move from issues of global trade to a broader challenge to the existing political system as a whole; to juxtapose their own model of direct democracy to the kind of corporate-dominated representative democracy embodied by the conventions. Some felt the two were reconcilable: that prison and death penalties issues could be used, ultimately, to raise the same broader questions. Others felt the compromise was worth the opportunity to create an ongoing alliance. In the end, the effort did not, in fact, lead to an ongoing alliance, and resulting recriminations caused quite a number of activists to give up on DAN entirely. However,the alliance, however temporary, was quite helpful in disseminating DAN-like tactics and styles of decision making, and even anarchist ideas themselves, in wider activist circles. Shortly after NYC DAN effectively dissolved in 2003, a new "Anarchist People of Color" network (APOC) was in the process of taking shape, based on almost identical organizational principles.

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[2] Student Liberation Activist Movement.

The early experience of APOC, however, already provides an excellent illustration of why direct-action-oriented groups had tended to be dominated by people classified as "white." When those who lack white privilege began to adopt such politics, they found they faced completely different levels of police repression. As one particularly startling incident in Brooklyn revealed, APOC couldn't even throw a benefit party in their own offices without having to worry about local police sweeping in to beat and arrest partygoers talking on the street.

All this was, perhaps, predictable. It is a notorious thing that during large-scale actions, police seem to target people of color for particular violence. As a result, many (non-anarchist) POC activist groups see direct action as itself a form of racial privilege, and made a great point of trying to keep those likely to engage in militant tactics away from their events. The short-lived Los Angeles DAN, which organized the protests against the Democratic convention in 2000, took the need to ally with community groups so seriously that they refused to allow their spaces to be used for anarchist meetings at all, and even employed marshals to exclude Black Bloc anarchists from their marches.

New York DAN was very different. To all intents and purposes it was itself an anarchist group. Still, it quickly found itself in trouble for its refusal take the same path as LA DAN. Immediately after A16, for instance, NYC DAN and an allied group—New York Reclaim the Streets—joined with several Mexican immigrant groups to organize a May Day march through lower Manhattan. It was to be an entirely peaceful—indeed, permitted—event, replete with musical bands and giant puppets. Still, as the marchers first assembled at Union Square, a tiny cluster of perhaps sixteen anarchists in Black Bloc appeared, simply intending to show the flag, as it were, and establish an overtly anarchist presence at the event. Before the march even started, police swooped in and arrested about a dozen of them.[3] The Mexican organizers were outraged, but less at the police than at their

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[3] They were held on the basis of an obscure, early nineteenth century "mask law" originally passed to suppress Irish highwaymen, which made it illegal for any members of a group of more

DAN fellow organizers, accusing them of putting their people—many of them undocumented workers—at risk by allowing a Black Bloc to assemble to begin with. They swore never to work with DAN again.

It's pretty obvious that when police launch preemptive strikes like this, fomenting divisions of this sort is half the point. The NYPD has actually proved remarkably adept at playing this sort of game, and has in fact made a habit, during particularly sensitive marches organized by POC groups, of nabbing one or two white anarchists on trumped-up charges. A year after the May Day March, during a march appealing for clemency for Native American activist Leonard Peltier in December 2000, for instance, an NYPD snatch squad suddenly broke into the middle of the march to tackle and drag away four (unmasked) anarchists. One was charged with possession of a battery-operated megaphone without a sound permit, the others with "resisting arrest." This was a very delicate issue, and everyone was making strenuous efforts to avoid anything that could be interpreted as a provocation: none of the anarchists were wearing masks, the woman with the megaphone had not in fact been using it but simply carrying it from one permitted rally point to another (and anyway, as many pointed out, there's no such thing as a moving sound permit). Still, the fact that everyone knew the arrests were a pretext and consciously intended to sow dissension didn't really matter. Afterwards, many activists who based their strategy on building alliances with POC groups (including, in this case, several former members of Love & Rage, now turned Maoists) argued that the very presence of black-clad anarchists could itself be considered a provocation. As a result, such activists often ended up challenging the very principle of direct action.

Whatever the underlying reasons, though, there's one thing that it's crucial to emphasize. Groups like DAN were largely white. Particularly striking was the absence of African Americans. For most of its history, NYC DAN had a single Black member, in an active core group of about fifty. This is not to say it was anything like exclusively white. There were always a fair number of Latinos (though more likely to be from countries like Brazil or Argentina than, say Mexico or Puerto Rico), and even larger numbers of activists of South or East Asian (Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean) or Middle Eastern (Turkish, Egyptian, Iranian) descent. Still, their numbers all put together rarely came to more than a third of the active membership. As for the rest, if they had any self-conscious ethnic identity, it was most likely to be Jewish or Irish. While DAN was certainly more diverse than, say, early SDS, in a city as diverse as New York, this was considered a matter of scandal.

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than three people assembled in public to disguise their faces. The Bloc had actually been warned of this but been falsely advised that if there were slogans written on their masks they could not be held accountable.

Dilemmas of Privilege That Are Not Necessarily Racial

I will be returning to the specifically racial issues periodically. They are the bane of all radical politics in North America. What I want to emphasize here is that these dilemmas are not simply effects of racism. Similar dilemmas crop up whenever one has a movement trying to combat situations of extreme social inequality. Always, those on the bottom, who have the most reason to want to challenge such inequalities, will also tend to have the most restricted range of weapons at their disposal with which to do so. Inevitably, this causes endless moral dilemmas for those whose privilege actually allows them to rebel.

This is not a new phenomenon. There is a vast literature on the subject. Eric Wolf (1969), for example, pointed out that in every peasant revolt we know about, the backbone of guerilla armies is always the middle peasantry; since the poorest stratum lacks the means to carry out a sustained insurrection, and the wealthiest lacks motivation. Similarly, E. P. Thompson (1971) and others have demonstrated that the mainstays of Early Modern "bread riots"—in reality, events very like what we would now call direct actions—tended to hail from the more prosperous among the laboring classes: neither bourgeois nor paupers, but members of the respectable working class. In fact, much of the early literature on radical movements seemed to argue that it was impossible for the truly oppressed to become genuine revolutionaries. Karl Mannheim (1929, also Norman Cohen 1957), for example, argued that not only do the truly oppressed tend not to engage in sustained revolt, their mode of imagining social alternatives tends to be absolute and millenarian. While the middle stratum "was disciplining itself through a conscious self-cultivation which regarded ethics and intellectual culture as its principle self-justification" (1929:73), and were developing rational utopias, the truly marginal tended to favor a kind of ecstatic vision of sudden and total rupture. Mannheim called this "chiliasm"—"a mental structure peculiar to oppressed peasants, journeymen, and incipient 'Lumpenproletariat,' [and] fanatically emotional preachers" (1929:204).[4] Hence, when the poorest elements did rise up, they tended to do so in the name of some great millenarian vision, in the belief that the world as we know it would soon come to an end in one blow and existing hierarchies be swept away. Now, while few nowadays would give much credence to the idea that the poor live in an eternal present or are incapable of long-term planning, Mannheim does have something of a point. Revolutionary movements have always tended to take on much of their temper and direction from those very "middle strata." At the very least, there has always been something of a gap in this respect between those who suffered the most in an unequal society and those most able to organize effective sustained opposition. In other words, those "most affected"—as the current activist catchphrase puts it—by feudal or capitalist structures rarely, if ever, organized openly against it. One can argue, like Jim Scott (1985, 1992), that the hidden resistance of the lowly is a great unrecognized force in world history—and surely one would be right. But rarely does this resistance take the form of overt rebellion.

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[4] Interestingly, it's the latter constituencies who have traditionally been written off as "anarchists."

When those disjunctions are superimposed over more profound ascriptions of difference—like race, culture, ethnicity—they become far more visible. But it seems to me they are always going to be there in some form or another. They are simply one of the inevitable side effects of social inequality.[5]

Of course, in the case of the globalization movement one common popular perception is that we are not even talking about members of a middle stratum, but about members of the elite. This idea has become so deeply entrenched, in fact, that it has become common wisdom not only among conservative commentators, but to some degree, to the public more generally. Before going on, then, let me briefly take on this perception: one which is, of course, a social phenomenon in its own right.

The Myth of Trust Funds

The stereotype runs something like this. The core of the "anti-globalization movement" is made up of rich or upper-middle-class teenagers, "trust fund babies" who can afford to spend their lives traveling from summit to summit making trouble. In a way, the accusation was predictable enough. Right-wing populism in the US is largely based on the accusation that liberals are part of an upper-middle-class elite whose values are deeply alien to that of working-class Americans. It would be hardly surprising that, faced with leftist radicals, the first instinct of a right-wing talk-radio host would be to assume that if liberals were drawn from the prosperous, revolutionaries would have to be drawn from the actual rich. On the other hand, if one examines the record, one finds that some of the first figures to make such claims—this was around the time of the Republican and Democratic conventions in the summer of 2000[6]—were figures of authority in the cities expecting protests (for example, the mayor of LA and Philadelphia police chief John Timoney), in a tone that certainly implied access to some kind of actual sociological information they could not possibly have had. These were in fact the very political figures who immediately afterwards ordered police to attack what even by conventional definitions were largely nonviolent protesters. It certainly gives one reason to wonder: especially, since so many police in Seattle had at first balked when given similar orders. Given the fact that a whole series of other rumors seemed to mysteriously appear around the same time about activists attacking police with acid and urine, one can only wonder whether this was part of a more calculated campaign to appeal to the class prejudices of the police themselves. The message, at the conventions and similar mobilizations, seemed to be: "Do not think of yourself as a working-class guy being paid to protect a bunch of bankers, politicians and trade bureaucrats who have contempt for you; think of this, rather, as an opportunity to beat up on their snotty children"—an understanding which would be, for the politicians' purposes, perfect, since they also did not want the police to actually maim or kill the protesters. Whether this sort of imagery emerges from police intelligence sources—which tend to draw heavily on research units from private security firms and conservative think tanks, and often, to reproduce very odd forms of right-wing propaganda—or whether police were actually listening to conservative radio hosts, is, at this juncture, impossible to say.[7] If nothing else, activists at major summits ever since have regularly reported more or less the same accusations on the part of police—as one friend summarized it to me: "You're all just a bunch of rich kids who put on masks so your daddies can't see your faces on the news when you go smash things up, and then go back home to your mansions and watch it all on TV and laugh at us."

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[5] All of this sounds a little like the famous political science notion of the "middle third" of the population, which can either identify its interests with the wealthy third above them, creating a conservative majority, or with the poor third below, creating a progressive one. I think the tendency to reduce social stratification to simply a matter of wealth (or even power) is a bit deceptive, and that it makes more sense to start from terms I began to develop above, to look at the relation between those who are revolting mainly against oppression, and those revolting mainly against alienation. I'll develop this argument further in a bit. For now, though, before turning to activist culture in more detail, I had better address the frequent accusation that activists themselves—and those in the globalization movement in particular—are in general the scions of a privileged class.

[6] R2K and D2K in activist parlance, or, in their combined form, R2D2. Unfortunately I have been unable to track the actual names of most of those who made such claims, and am therefore forced to rely on my own (no doubt imperfect) memory from the time.

If nothing else, the rumors became remarkably consistent.

So: Who Are Activists Really?

I) Work and Education

What follows is not based on statistical methodology of any sort, but having spent over seven years now among anarchists and others involved in direct action and I think I am in a position to make some initial generalizations. The first is that activists from truly wealthy backgrounds are exceedingly rare. In terms of economic background, in fact, anarchists tend to be extremely diverse. If there's anything that does set them off from the bulk of Americans it is that they are disproportionally likely to have attended college. Many, of course, are themselves students, but the activist core seems to be made up of what might even be called post-students: young women and men who have completed college, but are still living something like students, at least insofar as they are not mostly in regular, career-oriented nine-to-five jobs or child-rearing households.

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[7] We will be considering some of these questions further in Chapter 9.

I should emphasize while this is the core, it's certainly not the overwhelming majority. In New York, for instance, there is now an anarchist mothers' group. The average meeting of NYC DAN would normally include high school students and retirees as well, along with, say, forty-year-old squatters, many of whom had never attended an institution of higher learning. And NYC DAN was considered by many other activists decidedly upscale. The closer to the squatter scene one gets, the more one encounters activists without formal schooling, and this becomes almost universally the case when one gets to the level of the "travelers"—mostly teens and men and women in their twenties, runaways or living lives of voluntarily homelessness, moving from city to city. Just as, in the heyday of the IWW in the early decades of the twentieth century, there was a rich culture of hobos and hoppers of freight trains, so there is still today. And then as now, most do consider themselves anarchists. Many are orphans, escapees, or runaways of very modest backgrounds, with little access to educational institutions, though many are avid readers, and many versed in radical theory—in my own experience, most often, some variation on French Situationism. While the "travelers" may be numerically a relatively minor element in the movement, and somewhat marginal (most hate meetings), there are likely to be significantly more of them at any major mobilization than anyone who actually has a trust fund. They are also extremely important symbolically, because they set a kind of romantic standard for autonomous existence—dumpster-diving food, refusing paid employment—that represents one possible ideal for those wishing to establish an existence outside the logic of capitalism.

There are also those who join such a world voluntarily: they normally are college-educated, or sometimes college dropouts of a far more exalted social class. This is the sort of universe celebrated in popular anarchist books like CrimethInc's novel *Evasion* (2001), a semi-fantasy of middle-class, white, punk kids who drop out to join this world, living off trash and the left-overs of industrial society.[8] Such a life can represent a kind of vision of moral purity, a total rejection of an industrial society seen as an engine for the production of enormous quantities of waste. Insofar as it is assumed to be no longer possible to simply leave the system, to establish an autonomous existence in the woods[9], the best one can do is to live off its flotsam and jetsam. Many dumpster divers are quite proud of the fact that, despite the fact that they live off trash, they manage to maintain rigorous vegetarian diets. Many younger anarchists, the more "hardcore" sorts, follow suit to varying degrees. In New York, there is a young man named Thaddeus who claims he manages to get by on roughly five dollars a month, occupying empty buildings until the police expel him, dumpster-diving food, and all the while producing, with some friends, a monthly guide to free events in New York. Thaddeus is a regular of the direct action scene. He's something of an extreme case, and considered rather a heroic figure as a result, but many see this as really "living the life" in a way that most do not. While few resort to, say, street hustling or theft, for those who do there is a strong ethic of shoplifting, that insists that it is only legitimate to steal from large corporate outlets, never "mom and pop" stores[10]) if they can avoid it. Practices like dumpster diving are considered entirely ordinary in anarchist circles. In the kitchen of the New York offices of the Independent Media Center (IMC) there was posted, for many years, the schedule indicating at what times local restaurants were legally obliged to throw away their sushi. Activists on bicycles would regularly make the rounds to pick up piles of sushi rolls, all still neatly shrink-wrapped in plastic trays and containers, and deposit them in the IMC refrigerator. At another stop one can regularly find perfectly edible breadrolls and bagels. As Food Not Bombs activists often point out before major mobilizations, there's absolutely no problem scrounging up free food for, say, ten thousand people in a city like New York, if one wants to put in the effort—though coming up with the utensils can often be more difficult.

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[8] Consider here the following paean to dumpster diving: "Preaching salvation through trash, I was up against a lifetime of upper-middle-class conditioning. 'You'll die from eating that food!' they said. The living dead of the 'workforce' giving health advice. By what logic is the food deadly the moment it entered the trash bag, or passed through the back door? Food that had been on the shelf moments prior. It was a naive faith in the purity of store-bought food, and a staunch sureness of trash as poison. Almost funny. Well, I couldn't be sure where they learned their garbage superstition, but they paid for it each day from 9–5. It was sad, deeply rooted conditioning. Conditioning of benefit to the corporations only, at the expense of millions of broken backs and wasted lives of those who work to eat" (CrimethInc 2001:26).

There is, I should also note, a counter-discourse here. The majority of activists, who are trying to come to some kind of compromise with the mainstream economy can just as easily dismiss the travelers and squatters and dumpster divers as "crusties," "cruddies," "gutter-punks" coasting on their white privilege, or as middle-class kids playing at poverty in a way insulting to the real hardships of the homeless or dispossessed.[11] But often the critique is mixed with a sort of ambivalent respect, too.

Most activists—and again, I am using the term "activist" here mainly as a short-hand for "anarchist or others involved in anarchist-inspired direct action politics"—do feel they have to make some compromise with the existing economic order. Most feel that how one does so is very much a personal call. It is rather rare, in my experience, to hear the same sort of accusations of "selling out," of compromise as treason, that were so common in the 1960s and 1970s. Obviously, if one became a publicity agent for Monsanto, or a stockbroker, it would certainly be felt to compromise one's activist credentials. But it would have to be something almost that extreme.[12] Obviously, here too there are exceptions. The more hardcore one's own choices, the more likely one is to write off those who live a more comfortable or compromised style of life.

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[9] Though a few anarchists are interested in those who carry out rural experiments in this direction.

[10] I know a number of young men having admitted to—even boasted of—having been street hustlers at one time or another—but fewer young women, though a certain validation of the role of sex worker has become more common since the middle of the decade.

[11] Some of them certainly are—including all the characters in the CrimethInc novel. Often, those who make such accusations are unaware of the existence of genuinely homeless or dispossessed anarchists.

Older activists (over thirty, or especially, over forty) who are most likely to have full-time jobs often work in industries centering on the dissemination of knowledge and ideas. In the New York scene I know a handful of writers and journalists, a large number of teachers (especially grade school through high school), librarians, even one high school guidance counselor, and many tied in one way or another to the printing industry (a very traditional radical occupation). Some are theater managers, playwrights, choreographers, or otherwise adjacent to the arts. A surprisingly small number, in my own experience, work full time for NGOs (at least this is true in the specifically direct action end of things). Younger activists—the majority, living that kind of extended quasi-adolescence that I've called "post-student"—tend towards the sort of part-time jobs that allow very flexible times and hours. This is partly because the changing nature of the job market in the US has made full-time work harder to come by—many end up temping—but also because flexibility is so important to them. Some pick up a specific translatable skill: they learn bartending or web design, become lighting or sound technicians, acquire skills in catering. All are skills that make it fairly easy to pick up work for a week or a month and then move on. (Working as a musician also gives flexibility, but it pays so little one really can't support oneself without working full time.) Some work in activist-friendly enterprises: most often vegan kitchens or health-food stores. Others become civil engineers.[13] There are also a handful of full-time organizers who work for activist groups like the Rainforest Action Network, Ruckus Society, various peace groups, or labor unions, or needle-exchange programs, though these jobs pay notoriously little and activists of more modest means often can't afford to take them. Many such jobs pay nothing at all, but activists will still do them on a part-time volunteer basis.

In what follows, I'll try to outline an ideal-typical activist life-course, generalizing from people I knew in DAN, CLAC, the ACC, IMC and similar groups in the Northeast around 2000–2003. Doing so is necessarily a hypothetical exercise, since it assumes history will remain constant (which is unlikely) but projecting current patterns one might come up with something like this:

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[12] During the time that I was a professor at Yale, I was surprisingly rarely challenged on this account: when I was, it was invariably on email, by people I didn't know and was not actually working with. Obviously at Yale it was a slightly different story.

[13] There is an interesting tendency for anarchists to be drawn to urban planning.

> Our ideal-typical direct actionist is likely to either become politicized in high school, especially through the punk scene, or in college, becoming active in campus organizations. After either graduating or dropping out of college, they are likely to spend anywhere between one and ten years of intense involvement in activist groups. During the first few years, they will attend meetings regularly, perhaps, three, four or five a week (in the days right before action, sometimes four or five a day), usually in a variety of different groups, while supporting themselves through casual or part-time labor. This first phase is very intense and almost impossible to sustain continuously. Most break it up in one way or another. For example, one might spend six months doing activist work in one's home town, then spend a few months intensely working for money; then, once one has saved enough for an airplane ticket, take off to some distant locale: to help set up IMCs in South America, do solidarity work on the West Bank or Chiapas, absorb the squatter scene in Europe, or participate in a tree-sit. Many at this stage are on the road around half the time. Or one might keep oneself sane by occasionally plunging into a completely different sort of project—an artistic one, for example, an intense romance—only to reappear a few months later. One might run off for a few months to work on an organic farm—a habit so common there's actually an acronym for it: to woof (Work on an Organic Farm).[14] Those who concentrate all their energies on one place often tend to burn out completely after a year or two, and quit in exasperation; or else, find some specific, international or community-related project to concentrate their energies on and withdraw from everything else. As a result, groups like NYC DAN soon came to be made up of an active core and a kind of penumbra of semi-retired activists who were never really seen at meetings any more, but did often show up at actions or parties, and whose knowledge, contacts, and experience were available for those who still had personal contact with them.
>
> Younger anarchists who don't live in squats—again, the majority don't—often live in collective houses or apartments, frequently in poor or artsy, gentrifying neighborhoods. Some live in activist spaces: there were several people living in the New York IMC during the years 2000 to 2003, and others in Walker Space, a kind of IMC adjunct that housed a performance space and

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[14] I am informed that technically, this acronym is actually WWOOF for World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms and derives from a formal network in Canada. But it can also be used as a verb more informally.

television studios. Those prosperous enough to be able to afford a reasonable-size apartment often allowed at least some space in the apartment to be used for larger collective purposes.

Eventually, almost everyone ends up in a kind of semi-retirement. Those who become professional, paid activists usually end up in a different social milieu. Some go to grad school: grad students typically remain involved for a few years, then, as they become overwhelmed with work and experience the pressures of professionalization, drop out of activism entirely.[15] Others have children, or settle down—frequently with non-activists—or finally take on full-time, career employment. There are, certainly, those who maintain an ongoing presence nonetheless, but this is typically either because they find some career that keeps them close to the activist universe—become a labor lawyer and still do legal work for anarchists as well, for example; or manage a radical bookstore; or because they continue to live in a collective house, or squat, or intentional community; or else, because they learn how to carefully limit their involvement to a single, manageable project. The latter is difficult, since demands on an activist's time are potentially infinite. The trick to staying involved over the long term is to find a way to resist the temptation to overcommit. Relatively few, in my experience, successfully manage to do this.

One's later thirties, or certainly forties and fifties, then, are typically a period of complete or near-complete withdrawal. But if historical patterns hold, there is, for a certain number, a period even later in life of reengagement. After one's children are in college, one breaks up with a long-term partner, or retires, one might very well find oneself drawn back into the world of activism again, occasionally, at least for a little while, on as intense basis as at the beginning.

II) Class Backgrounds and Trajectories

I've mentioned that the only sense in which those involved in direct action could be said to be part of an elite is educational: the large majority have had some access to higher education, despite the fact that most Americans (slightly over half) have not.

Otherwise, if one looks at class backgrounds and trajectories, one encounters endless variation. Again, I have not conducted surveys. Still, I can say from my own personal experience that in the Northeast, the actual number of activists with trust funds can be counted on one hand. There are far fewer, in fact, than, say, the number of activists whose parents are career military officers—which is actually surprisingly high. But we are dealing with relatively small numbers in either case.

Speaking broadly, it seems to me activist milieus can best be seen as a juncture, a kind of meeting place, between downwardly mobile elements of the professional classes and upwardly mobile children of the working class. The first consist of children of white-collar backgrounds who reject their parents' way of life: the daughter of a tax accountant who chooses to work as a carpenter, the daughter of veterinarian who chose to live as a graphic artist, the son of a middle manager who chooses to become a civil engineer or professional activist. The other consisted of children from blue-collar backgrounds who go to college.

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[15] There are exceptions of course, but surprisingly few.

In historical terms, both correspond to a classic stereotype. The first represents the classic recruitment base for artistic bohemia; if not children of the bourgeoisie, as they were often assumed to be in 1850s Paris, where the term was first coined, then children born to members of administrative or professional elites, living in voluntary poverty, experimenting with more pleasurable, artistic, less alienated forms of life. The second represents the classic stereotype of the revolutionary, particularly in the Global South: children of the laboring classes (workers, peasants, small shop-owners even) whose parents strived all their life to get their sons or daughters into college, or even who managed to get themselves bourgeois levels of education by their own efforts, only to discover that bourgeois levels of education do not actually allow entry into the bourgeoisie, or often, any sort of regular work at all. One can compile endless examples among the ranks of the last century's revolutionary heroes: from Mao (child of peasants turned librarian), to Fidel Castro (unemployed lawyer from Cuba), and so on. In fact, both bohemia and revolutionary circles have historically tended to be a meeting place of both.

Obviously this is a highly schematized picture. First of all, it leaves out some significant groups entirely: for example, those who adopted bohemian lifestyles because their parents were bohemian, or the children of professional activists. One should not underestimate the degree of self-reproduction in such sub-classes. Also: while the stereotype of the bohemian as rich kid—secretly supporting his absinthe habits with money from home, eventually either to die of dissipation or go back to the board of daddy's company—is strikingly similar to the stereotype of the activist as trust-fund baby, it is probably no more accurate. Certainly there have always been scions of the bourgeoisie in both milieus, all the more influential for their money, social skills, and connections. But bohemian milieus of the last 150 years never really consisted primarily of children of the upper, or even professional, classes. As Pierre Bourdieu (1993) has recently shown, the social base for nineteenth century bohemian culture in Europe emerged, in part, through exactly the same processes that shaped social revolutionaries in the Global South: among talented children of peasants, for example, who had taken advantage of France's new educational system, and then found themselves excluded from conventional elite culture anyway. What's more, these milieus tended to overlap. Bohemia was full not only of working-class intellectuals and self-taught eccentrics, but outright revolutionaries. The friendship between Oscar Wilde and Peter Kropotkin was not atypical; actually, it could be taken as emblematic. Similarly, revolutionary circles have always been filled with children of privilege who have rejected their natal values: Karl Marx (lawyer's son turned penniless journalist) being the archetypical example. Every Mao had his Chou En-lai, even Castro had his Ché. The constitution of both milieus, then, is really quite similar. Which probably helps explain why artists have felt so consistently drawn to revolutionary politics.

All this is important to bear in mind, especially because there are those who have consistently tried to keep the two apart. In the 1990s, for example, social ecologist Murray Bookchin threw down the gauntlet in an essay called "Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Divide," in which he argues that anarchist theory has always had two sources: the individualist tradition tracing back to bourgeois bohemian figures like Stirner, and the social anarchism that emerged from the labor movement, with Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin:

> Hardly any anarcho-individualists exercised an influence on the emerging working class. They expressed their opposition in uniquely personal forms, especially in fiery tracts, outrageous behavior, and aberrant lifestyles in the cultural ghettoes of fin de siécle New York, Paris, and London. As a credo, individualist anarchism remained largely a bohemian lifestyle, most conspicuous in its demands for sexual freedom ("free love") and enamored of innovations in art, behavior, and clothing (Bookchin 1997).

Even the bomb-throwers of the 1890s, assassins of heads of state, Bookchin suggests, were not social anarchists (and it's true that they almost never seemed to be part of organized groups), but extreme individualists acting out their personal rage. While Bookchin doesn't really pursue the argument—the article is mainly a platform for an attack on John Zerzan, Bob Black, and Hakim Bey—the practical implications seem to lead in much the same place as Ranjanit's: a rejection of any existing "activist culture" as a product of bourgeois privilege, as setting one apart from the genuinely oppressed.

The essay as one might imagine has drawn almost endless attacks and made Bookchin's name anathema for whole sections of the anarchist movement. In fact, it seems to me the premise is simply wrong. This is not an unbridgeable divide. There was never anything remotely unbridgeable about it. Instead, I would argue the main problem for would-be revolutionary coalitions is that they always combine those primarily in rebellion against alienation, and those primarily in rebellion against oppression, and that the dilemma is always how to synthesize the two.

ART AND ALIENATION

One of my most striking memories of the NYC Direct Action Network was a very early meeting at which we were discussing a potential fundraiser. Someone announced they had booked a space for a benefit show and asked if anyone in the room had any particular skills or talents to contribute. Just about every single hand in the room went up. In the end, the facilitator asked everyone to go around in a circle and announce what they could do: there were poets, scene painters, fire jugglers, members of a cappella singing groups, shadow dancers, performance artists, flamenco guitarists, punk singers, magicians… Of forty-two people in the room, it turned out there were precisely five who could not come up with anything they might be able to contribute. It was all the more remarkable because DAN—unlike say, Reclaim the Streets, an allied New York group—was not even considered, by activist standards, a particularly artsy group. The direct-action scene in general is overwhelmingly dominated by people who were also engaged in some kind of creative self-expression. Musicians. Puppeteers. Drama people. Cartoonists. Artists. Much of this could be said to emerge just as much from the DIY (Do It Yourself) ethos of punk culture as the craftsperson-oriented small-scale creativity of hippie culture.[16]

> **Just one telling case study:**
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> Glass' father is a policeman, her mother an aerobics and yoga instructor. In high school she was a punk who made her own clothes, designing elaborate creations from cast-off and dumpster-dived clothing. She tells me she has keen memories of being laughed at by the "fashion punks," rich kids who bought their clothes pre-ripped at expensive boutiques, and how ridiculous they were, unaware they were proving themselves frauds to the whole spirit of what they were doing. She put herself through college largely by winning writing contests. After graduating she worked briefly for a glossy ecological magazine, lost her job when the magazine went bankrupt (she was never paid for most of her work) and now, in her mid-twenties, alternates between bartending and activist adventures, living in squats everywhere from Cleveland to Buenos Aires to Honolulu, occasionally publishing pieces in national magazines. Her aim she says is to buy land and spend at least half her time on a collectively managed, permaculture farm.

Characters like this could be seen, as I say, as trapped in a kind of suspended social adolescence. After all, in America, everyone engages in creative activities as a child (indeed one is forced to in school, from finger-painting to school plays). Normally, as one leaves adolescence one is expected to give most of this up. Adults, unless they are lucky enough to find a career involving creative work, are expected to express themselves largely through consumerism, or perhaps some kind of hobby—the latter especially when they retire. To my mind, though, this helps explain one of the great paradoxes of radical politics. One might say: adolescence is for most Americans the stage when one is simultaneously most alienated, and least alienated. This is why revolution can sometimes be pictured as a final overcoming of the adolescence of humanity—the break with the past that will finally rescue us from our perennial alienated state—or as the dawn of a kind of eternal adolescence, "the beginning of history." For most of us who are not living within the confines of a caste or guild society, adolescence is a period of potential: one could do, or be, almost anything. Maturity, social adulthood, is not even so much a matter of accepting one's particular role (as secretary, security guard, fund manager, mechanic) but even more, of coming to accept all those things that one is never going to be: rock star, olympic ski jumper, globe-trotting investigate reporter, first woman president, etc. If one looks at Marx's one famous (and notoriously minimal) attempt to define communism, it's almost completely defined around not having to do this: one can go fishing in the morning, herd sheep in the afternoon, and criticize over dinner, all without ever becoming a fisherman, shepherd, or critic. One is a generic human, undefined by one's current role. In contemporary terms, a perpetual adolescent.

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[16] Most 1960s hippies who did not entirely abandon their lifestyle tended to move into small-scale craft production, if not farming, then leatherwork, jewelry; they in effect became the people who had once been anarchism's strongest "natural" constituencies, the independent artisans and small-scale farmers who Marx ridiculed as a "petit bourgeoisie."

This is not to say activists are immature—unless, that is, one assumes maturity necessarily has to be a matter of renouncing one's creativity and sense of possibility, and accepting a life of mind-numbing boredom and daily subservience. Neither, though, do I find it useful to see all this simply in terms of "resistance"—at least, in the conventional academic sense that assumes that, since power is the ultimate reality, any form of practice can only be seen as either reproducing or resisting it.[17] This is why it seems to me more useful to return to the alternative intellectual traditions that activists largely prefer, and to see the operative terms here as a balance between the revolt against alienation and the revolt against oppression.

Styles of Bohemianism

The hippies of the 1960s, and then the punk movement of the late 1970s and 1980s, have been seen as the first movements of mass bohemianism[18]: a broad popularizaton of the bohemian ideal of the sacrifice of bourgeois comforts for the pursuit of spontaneity, creativity, and pleasure. Or one might see them as points where forms of bohemianism themselves took on the aspect of mass movements. There is of course an endless debate about the significance of all this: to what degree is this all a form of resistance (i.e., Hebdige 1979), to what extent are these movements really the avant garde of consumerism, exploring domains of experience that can be effectively commodified in the next generation (Campbell 1987). For me, though, one of the interesting things is the degree to which these historically constituted categories become, effectively, permanent. They are seen as modes of being. The sense today is that there will always be punks and hippies:

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[17] For a good critique of the logic of resistance, see the introduction to Fletcher 2007.

[18] The term seems to derive from rock critic Robert Christgau (e.g., Christgau 2000).

> **Extract from notebooks, Winter 2001**
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> ***Brief excursus on the terms "punk" and "hippie"***
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> No one would ever use these terms to describe themselves. I've never heard anyone say "I am a punk" or "I am a hippie." They are terms you use to describe someone else. In East Coast circles, to call someone a hippie is always to make fun of them, at least slightly: this despite the fact that half the time, the speaker herself might so be considered from another point of view—i.e., Brooke's comment about the new Santa Cruz chapter of DAN, "probably a bunch of hippies and deadheads but we love them anyway." Or: "when you're proposing we organize a drum circle, are we talking *good* drumming, or just bad hippie drumming?" The term "punk" in contrast is almost never pejorative, It tends to be used in a more simply descriptive fashion: i.e., "I'm talking about Laura. You know, that kind of punky girl with the green hair?"
>
> Still, there are very few who can be easily and clearly categorized as either one or the other. Some exist. Ariston with her mohawk is pretty obviously very punk; Neala is hard to see as anything but a hippie (even if her partner is about as Goth as one can be). But these are extreme cases. Most are more like, say, Warcry, who wears dirty hooded sweatshirts and patches as she arranges leaves and flowers all over the Indypendent Media Center walls—an idiosyncratic mix of both.
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> Often the terms are contrasted generationally, with the hippies always being the stodgy older generation. Brad talks about the striking contrast between the old fashioned, 1960s-style, hippie forest blockades in Oregon and Northern California and the new energy and militant tactics introduced when the punk kids got involved. This coming from a forest activist who, though instrumental in bringing the punks to the forest in the first place, is, by New York standards, nothing if not a hippie. "Hippie" in fact regularly becomes a synonym for "pacifist," and "punk" for "younger, militant anarchist." Thus, in Seattle when self-appointed "peace cops" in some cases physically assaulted Black Bloc anarchists to stop them from breaking windows (the Black Bloc anarchists re-

> fused to hit back, since they were nonviolent) it's almost always described as a case of "punks getting beaten up by hippies."

Of course, these are hardly the only terms evoked (I am not even entering into the influence of the rave scene, for example, or radical hiphop), but I don't think it's illegitimate to focus on the centrality of punk, if only because so many of the most active white anarchists seem to have been drawn in from an early experience of the punk scene.

A lot has been written about punk as a subculture, but what I want to emphasize here is the role of punk as a venue for the dissemination of a kind of pop Situationism. This Situationist legacy is probably the single most important theoretical influence on contemporary anarchism in America, and it means that—much though many anarchists are familiar with academic terminologies—they are using a very different theoretical vocabulary.

The Situationist International was originally a group of radical artists who, over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, transformed themselves into a political movement. One can see them as the culmination of a certain trend. From at least the time of the Dadaists and Futurists, avant-garde artistic movements had begun acting like vanguardist parties, putting out manifestos, purging one another, and the like. The Situationists were the first that made the transition entirely, ultimately making no original art of their own at all. As a group, they behaved like a kind of caricature send-up of Marxist sectarians, constantly purging and condemning one another.[19] Guy Debord (1967) laid out an elaborate dialectical theory of "the society of the spectacle," arguing that under capitalism, the relentless logic of the commodity—which renders us passive consumers—gradually extends itself to every aspect of our existence. In the end, we are rendered a mere audience to our own lives. Mass media is just one technological embodiment of this process. The only remedy is to create "situations," improvised moments of spontaneous, unalienated creativity, largely by turning aside the imposed meanings of the spectacle, breaking apart the pieces and putting them together in subversive ways. (Hence the most enduringly popular Situationist product, called "Can the Dialectic Break Bricks?," often shown at fundraisers, is a Hong Kong kung fu film, resubtitled.) Raoul Vaneigem (1967, 1979) elaborated a theory of revolution built around a destruction of all relations built on the principle of exchange, on "survival" as opposed to "life," with an often odd, jangly, but still somehow exhilarating, mix of ultraleft Marxism—a glorification of spontaneous worker's councils and the insurrectionary wildcat strike—and the pursuit of unmediated forms of pleasure, an unleashing of desire and the collapse of art into life.

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[19] In fact they purged one member, an architect, just because he was associated with someone who had actually designed a building.

There's actually a concrete, genealogical connection between punk and Situationism. Malcolm McLaren, the English producer who effectively invented the Sex Pistols, and hence the punk movement, had been involved in a Situationist splinter group and Sex Pistols' artist Jamie Reid used Situationist principles to design their cover art and general aesthetic (Savage 1991). Whether McLaren was serious or not (some—e.g., Elliot 2001—claim he was just talking out of his hat), Situationist principles have become firmly ensconced in the punk philosophy—particularly among the hundreds of smaller, explicitly anarchist punk bands that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s (Crass, Conflict, the Exploited, the Dead Kennedys). Catchy lines from Vaneigem endlessly recur in song lyrics, and Situationist literature is widely available in any anarchist infoshop or bookstore, along with their contemporary, Cornelius Castoriadis and other members of the Socialisme ou Barbarie group, and historical material on the French near revolution of '68. Notably missing in most such bookstores is any significant space for most of what in France has come to be referred to as "'68 thought": Deleuze, Foucault, or Baudrillard—those authors seen as representing radical French thought in the academy. Essentially, punks and revolutionaries are still reading French theory from immediately before '68, the academics are mainly reading theory from immediately afterwards, much of which consists of a prolonged reflection on what went wrong, most often, concluding that revolutionary dreams are impossible (Starr 1995).

Punk, of course, is designed to be somewhat off-putting for the uninitiated. This makes it difficult for the outsider to notice that—despite the violent, angry, over-amplified aesthetic—it effectively played the same cultural role for white urban youth of the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, as folk music did in the 1950s and 1960s—as a kind of stripped down, anyone-can-do-it music of the people. It also played a similar political role. The spirit is best summed up in the late 1970s punk zine cited by Dick Hebdige (1979:123), which provided a little finger chart of three chords and the caption, "now go form a band and do it yourself." DIY became the basic punk credo. Make your own fashion. Form your own band. Refuse to be a consumer. If possible, become a dumpster diver and don't buy anything. If possible, refuse wage labor. Do not submit to the logic of exchange. Reuse and redeploy fragments of the spectacle and commodity system to fashion artistic weapons to subvert it.

One might say, in fact, that there are two intellectual streams that emerged from the period of May '68 in France that are still alive in the US and English-speaking world: the pre-1968 revolutionary strain, kept alive in zines, anarchist infoshops, and the Internet, and the post-1968 strain, largely despairing of the possibility of a mass-based, organized revolution, kept alive in graduate seminars, academic conferences, and scholarly journals. The first tends to recognize capitalism as an all-encompassing symbolic system that creates extreme forms of human alienation, but sees it as possible to rebel against it in the name of pleasure, desire, and the potential autonomy of the human subject. The second tends to see the system (whether it is now labeled capitalism, power, discourse, etc.) as so all-encompassing that it is constitutive of the desiring subject him- or herself, rendering any critique of alienation, or possibility of a revolution against the system itself, effectively impossible. At the risk of editorializing (though in this context, it would be dishonest to pretend I could possibly do anything else), the situation is full of endless ironies. The Situationists argued that the system renders us passive consumers, but issued a call to actively resist. The current radical academic orthodoxy seems to either reject either the first part or the second: that is, either it argues that there is no system imposed on consumers, or that resistance is impossible. The first has long been most popular: since the early 1980s, in fact, anyone who makes a Situationist-style argument in an academic forum can expect to be instantly condemned as puritanical and elitist for suggesting consumers are allowing themselves to be passively manipulated. Rather, consumers are creatively reinterpreting consumer styles, fashions, and products in all sorts of subversive ways (e.g., Miller 1987, 1995). In other words, ordinary folks are already practicing detournment.

The great irony here is that this emerging orthodoxy, which quickly became the mainstay of cultural studies (and later, anthropology), it was strictly confined to the academy. Cultural studies tracts were rarely, if ever, read by the 'ordinary folk' in question, while Situationist literature, which by these standards was the most elitist position possible, actually does have a certain popular audience. *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (Vaneigem 1967), for example, is almost never assigned in courses or cited in academic texts, but it's just as regularly read by college-age radicals now as it was thirty years ago. It all rather confirms that, as my friend Eric Laursen once suggested to me, the reason Situationism can't be integrated in the academy is simply because "it cannot be read as anything but a call to action." This is, of course, precisely what makes it so popular with activists. Situationism, with its total rejection of the system, its call for militant artistic interventions, its faith that these might ultimately contribute to social revolution, is the perfect philosophy for an activist first drawn to punk by a feeling of profound alienation from mass society, and determined to do something about it.

Another effect of this rift is that the academy has, starting with the post-1968 thinkers in France, largely jettisoned the idea of "alienation." Without either a unified subject, or any notion of more natural or authentic relation of that subject with the world and other people, older theories seemed naïve and indefensible. The term disappeared in much social theory. Insofar as it was retained, it was in certain branches of sociology where alienation became something that could be statistically formalized and measured in questionnaires: leading quickly to the conclusion that the most alienated (isolated, angry) members of society were the most marginal (undocumented aliens, for example, or members of oppressed minorities). Partly as a result, alienation has come to be seen as the psychological experience of oppression: modern studies of the subject speak of "racial alienation," "gender alienation," alienation based on sexual identity or poverty, and so on (Schmidt & Moody 1994, Geyer & Heinz 1992, Geyer 1996). This in itself helps explain the continuing appeal of '60s theorists: everything now is cast in terms of exclusion from mainstream society. Alienation is a measure of this exclusion. This is, however, essentially a liberal conception. The power of the older view of alienation was to insist that it is not just a matter of exclusion, but that there is something profoundly, fundamentally wrong with the mainstream itself. That even the winners are ultimately miserable, at least, compared with what they could be in a free, egalitarian society. Anarchists—at least, those who cannot claim to come from some oppressed group—are left with a visceral feeling of rage and rejection against a system that seems both all-encompassing and monstrous, and an official intellectual culture which can offer no theoretical explanation of why they should feel that way.

I've taken up some of the questions elsewhere. In an earlier essay on anarchism (Graeber 2003:337), for example, I asked why it was that even when there is next to no other constituency for revolutionary politics, one still finds revolutionary artists, writers, and musicians. My conclusion: that there must be some kind of link between the experience of non-alienated labor, of imagining things and then bringing them into being, and the ability to imagine social alternatives. I concluded by suggesting that revolutionary coalitions might always be said to rely on a kind of alliance between society's least alienated and its most oppressed (and that revolutions actually happen when these two categories largely coincide). This would, at least, help explain why it almost always seems to be peasants and craftsmen—or even more, newly proletarianized former peasants and craftsmen—who actually overthrow capitalist regimes, and not those inured to generations of wage labor—or, alternately, the otherwise puzzling fact that so many teenagers can be led from the experience of moshing in punk clubs to conclude that their own freedom is intimately tied to the fate of impoverished Tzeltal-speaking farmers in Chiapas.

Still, this formulation remains more than a little crude. Probably, the real opposition should be between those brought to radical politics in a revolt against alienation, and those who are revolting against oppression. Obviously, it's not as if there are many for whom it is simply one or the other. Still, from the activist's perspective, there are very good reasons not to abandon the distinction entirely. Without it, it would be impossible to argue that revolutionary change would be in the interest of everyone, even those who cannot be said to be in any way oppressed. On the other hand, one would hardly wish to argue that the despair of a wealthy suburban teenager in the US, faced with a life of soulless consumerism, has quite the same moral weight as, say, the despair of a poor Mozambiquan teenager slowly dying of a preventable disease. It is precisely this dilemma, I think, that leads to the endless tensions and recriminations that haunt activist life.

Random Observations on Activist Culture

> A society that denies us every adventure makes its own abolition the only possible adventure.
>
> —Reclaim the Streets slogan

If one sees capitalism as a gigantic meaningless engine of endless expansion that reduces the majority of the planet's inhabitants to hopeless poverty, that reduces even its beneficiaries to lonely isolated atoms doomed by fear and insecurity to lives of mind-numbing work and meaningless consumerism, even as it threatens the destruction of the planet—but if at the same time, one does not wish to, or does not believe it possible to simply flee the system, but rather wishes to stay and fight—then what precisely can one do? What sort of social relations is it possible to create among those who wish to make their lives a refusal of the very logic of capitalism, even as they necessarily remain inside it?

The logic of bohemian life has always been an attempt to answer this. It has always tended towards both the cultivation of adventure, danger, and extreme forms of experience, but at the same time, of relations of mutual aid and trust between those pursuing it—even, often, those who might otherwise be strangers. This is precisely the sensibility one encounters in direct actions too.

Consider again the idea of a mosh pit, in which dancers hurl themselves into one another, or stage-dive into the crowd. It's a matter of both creating dangerous, even violent situations, but at the same time, placing an almost blind faith in surrounding strangers—for help and support—since, after all, if they did not catch or buffer you, you might well end up with a broken neck. In principle, the logic of play aggression and ultimate trust has much in common with the sadomasochism that is constantly alluded to (though rarely practiced) in the punk aesthetic. It's the kind of pleasure that arises from adventure: excitement, unpredictability, faith, and reliance on one's companions—which can only be real with the endless possibility of betrayal. At the same time, though, it is anything but an ethos of machismo. One thing that struck me very quickly in becoming involved in anarchist circles was the acceptance of physical frailty.

Notebook extracts: June 2000, with some later jotted additions

Frailty:

Most activists do not seem incredibly physically fit—certainly not athletes. They tend to be wiry, occasionally fat, but almost never muscular. "Scrawny vegans" as the stereotype goes. (Famous LA newspaper comment during the DNC protests in 2000: "There were twice as many police as demonstrators; or if you count by weight, four times as many." Similarly from the other side in the "anarchist guide to LA," published at the same time: "the athletic-looking guy dressed like a Hollywood version of a punk rocker who's urging you to attack the cops—he *is* a cop." In other words, one way to detect an infiltrator is sheer physical fitness. This despite the fact that many have, as one might expect, plenty of outdoorsy skills and experience, climbing trees and walls and that sort of thing. Hippies with their hiking boots and trail mixes tend to be more fit than punks: they are at least wiry and resilient. This is especially surprising at first when you first get to know Black Bloc kids, who in the press are supposed to be the "violent" ones and who, even among activists, have been called "the marines of our movement," and discover they're mostly a bunch of shy, ectomorphic teenagers. They, of course, are also the most likely to be vegans. I suspect this is one thing that must really complicate relations with the police, since they are probably exactly the kind of kids that those grade school kids who were later to become cops used to bully.[20]

The curious emphasis on weakness seems echoed by the marked concern for people with disabilities and medical conditions taking part in actions that I—like most newcomers, I think—at first found rather disconcerting. There were endless discussions in legal trainings of what to expect if arrested and in need of insulin, or AIDS medication, or a host of other conditions. "Will the police let you keep your medicine? No. They are supposed to supply you with medicine from a police medic, but usually don't. What about hypoglycemics?" (There was a widely circulated story about a hypoglycemic woman at A16 who went into a sugar-fit and ended up arrested when she grabbed someone's cell phone thinking it was her own.) The obvious first reaction, which most neophytes have to suppress, is what is a diabetic AIDS patient even doing putting him- or herself in the way of tear gas, truncheons, and arrest in the first place? But it's a combination of the obvious desire to be maximally open with, I suspect, a covert sense that, if one is engaged in a moral contest with police, weakness can be strength. We must force them to be humanitarians!

Combined with the endless food taboos, all this makes for a kind of maze of barriers: some people are vegetarian, some are vegan, others are allergic to

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[20] Obviously there's some class element too, on which the authorities like to play… as there is in junior high school.

> nightshades or suffer from environmental illness, many seem very close to hypochondria with endless real or imaginary ailments. Yet these same people often live some of the most adventurous lives imaginable.
>
> Then we can get into the phenomenology of backrubs, like the chain backrubs in the break from facilitation training. Holding hands or linking arms in human chains. General patterns of touching: ordinary Americans almost never touch each other. Anarchists seem especially fond of hugs (though some, Crusty Canadians from CLAC have been known to bemusedly ask us New Yorkers whether we've been corrupted by California Starhawk types with all this touchy-feely nonsense), people leaning on each other, holding hands. From very early on, at the legal training in DC, I noticed how much of this: all the trainings involved physical contact, from carrying people off limp, to just sitting pressed up against others in overcrowded rooms.
>
> I wonder if one reason for the touchy/food finicky/embracing weakness aspects is the prominence of women in the movement—though this is slightly confusing, since women are almost never a majority in large meetings and often make up at best a third of the people in the room. On the other hand, they often include the most prominent organizers and participants. Is it better to say that feminine sensibilities pervade, or, that the style of interaction consensus process tends to encourage draws on sensibilities that have, in the United States, historically been associated with the way women interact with one another than with the way men do; or, for that matter, with the way men interact with women? It is largely, but not strictly, desexualized. Often the feeling, at least if one is not part of some sexual identity group, is that one should act (at least in public) as if sex is not particularly important, just one possible aspect of a more general common physicality.

Obviously, all of this varies from one subculture to another. For many years at ABC No Rio, an anarchist social center in the Lower East Side, there was—aside from the usual zine magazine, computers, and the like— a weight room used by members of a group called RASH, the "Red Anarchist Skinheads." But subcultural groups are always defining themselves against one another.

The play of desire and mutual dependence reappears on all sorts of subtle levels. Here's an extract from the same notebook, not long after:

> **Notebook extract, July 2000**
>
> ***Cigarettes:***
>
> A lot of activists smoke. Most older ones seem to have smoked at some time in their lives. I always found it a bit incongruous, at A16, to see all these idealistic kids blockading the streets with cigarettes hanging out of their mouths;

> especially, teenage girls sitting around bumming cigarettes from each other. But this is actually rather appropriate, because it creates a constant mobilization of feelings of need, discipline, sharing, and desire (the "community of addiction," as I used to call it, that binds all smokers). Usually for every three or four activists who smoke, or might, there's one who actually has a pack. Kevin was cast in this role with Scully et al. last week. The distribution of cigarettes, lighting them off others, etc., becomes a constant willed collapse of autonomy—me, when I used to smoke, it was a matter of principle *never* to allow myself to be trapped in a situation where I'd run out and wasn't in a position to buy more, but here it's the opposite. One is dependent on communal good will and sharing for what one *really* desires most urgently in the world, at least at that moment.
>
> Especially large proportions of vegans smoke.
>
> It rather reminds me of a story I heard about Martin Luther King. He was actually a chain smoker, but was convinced early on it would convey the wrong lesson to the nation's youth to ever be seen smoking in public. Endless discipline, but with endless desire lurking behind the public facade. Needless to say, no one smokes in meetings, or indoors at all. Thus, the end of a meeting is usually followed by clusters of people immediately running out to smoke, sitting on the concrete to roll tobacco, bumming butts from one another, people just taking a few puffs off someone else's or passing individual cigarettes around.

Other drugs seem to play a less prominent role because they aren't so addictive. Therefore, the whole dynamic of desire and community doesn't enter in. My notes in this case continued:

> ***Other drugs:***
>
> This varies by scene. Pot is occasional, but surprisingly infrequent. It's used roughly to the degree one would expect from any young people of the same class or socioeconomic background. Beer is quite a bit, often at bars. Ecstasy is popular among the raver types with which there's a definite overlap with certain parts of the activist scene. Of course, during street actions, drugs are totally bad news and you're always reminded not to bring any: "Even if you ditch a joint the moment the cops appear, someone's going to get it pinned on them." So bringing drugs to an action would be an act of total lack of solidarity. For an activist to show up completely drunk, or completely stoned, at an action is taken as either a sign no one would possibly want to be in an affinity group with them or, in my experience, most often, as a sign that activist in question is personally falling apart and needs help. As for drug paranoia, there are all sorts of levels of context and historical experience: I am reminded of the time I made a beverage

> run while showing a film with some former Black Panthers. When I suggested I pick up some Coke, one startled woman immediately corrected me: "Please! Say 'Coca Cola!'" These were, obviously people used to constant surveillance at a time when drug busts commonly landed activists in jail. I've never heard anything like that amongst anarchists nowadays: paranoia is directed at other things. In fact, at minor events, or street party-style actions that are halfway to raves anyway, attitudes towards drugs can be very relaxed. One friend told me a long story about being searched and locked in jail overnight after the RTS Times Square event only to discover, after he got out, that he'd forgotten he'd had a joint in his shoe the whole time. But these are "Temporary Autonomous Zones" of a rather different sort.

The one theme that recurs endlessly in all of this is "autonomy": simultaneously the greatest anarchist value, and the greatest dilemma. Certain forms of autonomy—the isolated individualism of mainstream American society, with its solitary pleasures—are precisely that against which one is rebelling. Or, perhaps, one might say, the question is how to balance autonomy, solidarity, and freedom. Cornelius Castoriadis (1987, 1991), for example, defined "autonomy" as the ability of a community to live only under rules they had themselves collectively created, and had the right to reexamine constantly. For many anarchists, freedom appears to mean the ability to create new communities, and ties of mutual dependence, more or less on the spot, and to move back and forth between them as one wishes. An action, a party, a picnic, a dance, can all be temporary autonomous zones where desires coalesce and the leap of faith involved in trusting strangers itself becomes a large part of the adventure—even when police are not present, which, as we shall see, is rarely, since police have a notable tendency to show up whenever anarchists get together. The dilemmas, though, become much more acute when attempts are made—as they regularly are—to turn TAZs into PAZs, to move from temporary to more permanent zones of autonomy.

In the next section then let me talk a little about more permanent activist spaces. As we'll see, these are almost never quite, entirely, permanent. Every space has to be, to some degree, conquered, and most are almost instantly besieged.

Activist Landscapes

In a city like New York, anarchist spaces often have the quality of an archipelago. Certain neighborhoods contain relatively dense clusters of squats, community gardens, social or community centers, radical bookstores/infoshops, and other more-or-less friendly institutions: co-ops, vegetarian restaurants, second-hand bike shops, avant-garde theaters, friendly churches, or even caf és and bars where activists are likely to be found hanging out.

Sometimes there's a center to them; sometimes they're more diffuse. Between the beginning of 2000 and the end of 2001, the heyday of New York City DAN, there was a very much a center for the activist scene in New York's Lower East Side. This was a local community center called Charas El Bohio, located inside a former schoolhouse. Charas El Bohio stood at the center of a nexus of institutions almost all of which had been won by prolonged community struggle.

The story of Charas is quite interesting. Technically, "Charas" was the name of a community group—"El Bohio" referred to the building. The community group had been founded in 1965 by a group of Puerto Rican former gang members. When they first created it, they were working with Buckminster Fuller on building geodesic dome housing for the poor, but they soon became a sponsor of cultural festivals. El Bohio in turn came into being when, in 1979, some of them, working with some former Panthers, squatted the Christadora, a beautiful but then abandoned settlement house located directly east of Tompkins Square Park, and towering over the surrounding neighborhood. This eventually led to a stand-off with the city government, who were ultimately willing to resolve the matter by offering the squatters the abandoned schoolhouse down the street, the former P.S. 64. The building had been empty since 1975, was by that time in a state of near-collapse, and inhabited mainly by heroin addicts. The deal was formalized with a gentlemen's agreement of sorts: the Christadora was sold to a private developer and eventually became an expensive condominium, and Charas quickly began rebuilding the newly dubbed El Bohio, offering free space to artists and craftspeople in exchange for work restoring windows and roofs. Before long, the place had become a center for artists, theater and dance groups (who rented rehearsal spaces for negligible fees), and hosted every sort of political group and event. Charas also became the effective political center of the network of squats and community gardens in the area surrounding Tompkins Square, mostly also created in the same period—the 1970s and early 1980s—when much of the neighborhood lay abandoned.

This story has been told many times (Abu-Lughod 1994; Mele 2000; Tobocman 1999). There were points in the 1970s when three-quarters of the area's housing stock was abandoned by landlords, seized by the city for non-payment of taxes. The New York punk scene in fact really emerged from precisely this time and place, and its aura of urban apocalypse and despair had everything to do with the feeling of a city that was literally being allowed to fall into ruin, abandoned to rats, junkies, and arsonists. In reaction, a host of artists, squatters, activists, and new immigrants reclaimed buildings and green spaces, and these, in turn, soon became the object of intense struggles—near-warfare, at times—during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the area started to be gentrified again. The most famous incidents, of course, were the "Tompkins Square Riots" of 1988 and

1989, fought over police efforts to clear out homeless encampments from the park itself. Equally grueling, though, were the battles over the surrounding squats. There were mysterious fires that the fire department refused to put out, sudden dawn raids by riot cops backed by helicopters and armored personnel carriers. In some cases, there were protracted sieges so bitter that it was years before police attempted to move on a squat again. The final result was that by 2002, twenty-two squats had been reduced to eleven, though, in that year, the city finally gave in and allowed the remaining squatters to gain title to their homes.

The story of the community gardens was similar: an archipelago of green spaces reclaimed from what were originally deserted lots full of rats and garbage. They were planted and maintained by local collectives or neighborhood organizations; then, came under siege as the area began to be gentrified. More Gardens!, an activist group dedicated to defending them, met regularly in Charas, and community gardeners also used the large downstairs rooms in Charas to plan pageants. The neighborhood was famous for its beautiful spring and winter festivals, with their elaborate costumes, puppets, light shows, music and dramatic performances—just as, before actions and marches, the same rooms were used for painting banners and assembling puppets. The building itself was always full of art—huge painted sculptures or floats would mysteriously appear in the hall and disappear a few days later—there was an auditorium one could use for performances and rooms one could rent for meetings, always for minimal fees, and the whole building could be rented for parties, provided they didn't go too late at night. For activists, it was an inestimable resource.

Charas stood directly east of the park, on Eighth Street between Avenues B and C. If one set out from Charas and proceeded south along Avenue B, one passed a series of activist landmarks: several popular vegetarian restaurants, one very large and elaborate community garden marked by a towering sculpture made of a kind of staged pyramid decorated with every sort of discarded stuffed animal and similar bric-a-brac, and then, Blackout Books, an anarchist infoshop located in a storefront shop next to a Hare Krishna center, across the street from a credit union and series of thrift shops. Blackout was the sort of place one could drop by pretty much any time of the day and find an interesting conversation. Across Houston Street, one entered a rapidly gentrifying area full of trendy hipster joints, emerging from a largely poor Latino neighborhood, spotted with a few ancient Jewish synagogues and businesses, to reach ABC No Rio. ABC had been named after a squat that was the site of a famous battle, and it had started as both squat and art space, Later it had been legalized as a social center—that is, the squatters got to keep the building on condition they no longer live there—though always, it seemed, under complex conditions that made their occupancy rather tentative. Downstairs, ABC hosted art shows, but especially, it became a center for the local punk and hardcore scene. Upstairs, it sported a zine library, a free computer space, darkrooms, a silkscreening studio, and a kitchen that was used, several times a week, by the New York chapter of Food Not Bombs. FNB would dumpster-dive food—mostly fresh food, often still in plastic or wrappers that had been thrown away by large institutions—and produce vegetarian meals that they would then distribute free back in Tompkins Square park.

There were a series of other friendly institutions as well: Bluestockings Womyn's Bookstore on Allen Street, the War Resisters League on Sullivan and Lafayette—a pacifist center which had existed since the 1920s and had a whole building of its own (the "Peace Pentagon," it was sometimes called)—the Sixth Street community center, radical theater spaces, St. Mark's Church (where a squatter was one of the priests). But the key institutions, the ones that activists knew they could always rely on, were all, to some degree tenuous. Like the squats, they had been won by struggle, usually by direct action, maintained under great pressure from state institutions, and all were in constant danger of being taken away. Almost every one of them seemed surrounded by a sense of desperate drama; if they were dependable in the sense of being clearly friendly to anarchists, they were not dependable in the sense that one could be sure they would still be there in six months or a year. And, indeed, by 2002, only a couple years after the foundation of DAN, the whole network largely fell apart.

The community gardens were a prime example. The Guiliani administration, on coming to office in 1994, almost immediately launched a broad offensive against the whole network of community gardens, redefining them as vacant lots and introducing a plan to auction off 741 of them throughout the city for the development of "affordable housing." (In one weekly radio address, Guiliani made it clear this was an attack on the very principle of common property: "This is a free-market economy," he said. "The age of Communism is over.") A prolonged struggle ensued, peaking in 1998 and 1999 with numerous direct actions in which More Gardens! activists locked down in front of bulldozers, as well as one Reclaim the Streets action that closed down Avenue A for several hours and another that led to the arrest of sixty-two people at a lockdown on the West Side Highway. Several gardens were destroyed, but in the end, Guiliani suffered one of his administration's few major defeats when a coalition of wealthy patrons intervened to buy up several of the targeted gardens in order to preserve them—and the state attorney general shortly thereafter sued the city to prevent any more auctions, on the grounds that doing so violated the city's own regulations that there should be at least two acres of green space for every thousand inhabitants.

This was a great victory, but an activist soon learns that no victory is irreversible. Also, that every victory tends to be accompanied by terrible, tragic losses. Another Guiliani target was Charas itself. In fact, destroying it soon seemed to have become a kind of obsession of his administration. At least, that was how it seemed to local housing activists. During the entire period of DAN's existence, the building was under legal siege. Since its status rested on what was, effectively, a gentlemen's agreement with the government—the building being leased from the government for a dollar a year—it was perfectly legal for Guiliani's administration to break the deal and auction it off which it did—at the same auction, on July 20, 1998, as several of the largest community gardens. The auction itself has become something of a legend among Lower East Side activists, who used every means possible to disrupt it, ranging from protests outside, to phony buyers trying to bid up the price inside, to the release of ten thousand crickets on the auction house floor—which did manage to clear the house, but only temporarily. Eventually the title was passed to an anonymous purchaser who—despite the city's efforts to protect his identity—was soon revealed to be one Gregg Singer, a small-time property developer from the Upper West Side. Singer was now technically the owner of the building (El Bohio), and Charas merely his tenant. He immediately moved to evict, but this was difficult: his hands were tied by a restricted-use covenant that allowed the building only to be used for "community facility use." As a result, in order to expel Charas, he had to demonstrate that he had lined up new tenants who were also going to use the building for cultural or public-service related purposes. The legal problem from his perspective, then—at least, until a prolonged process of appeals and legal skirmishes was finished—was to find a legitimate cultural institution willing to lease the building, even if they knew that doing so would mean evicting a neighborhood community center. This was almost impossible, but it meant that the entire activist community that used Charas was subject to instantaneous "Singer alerts": the new landlord was obliged to announce visits with prospective tenants three hours in advance, so Charas would then send a message immediately over activist listservs, as well as their own phone trees, calling everyone available to dash down to the yard in front of Charas for an instant demo, grabbing signs left for the purpose in the Charas lobby, explaining to the visitors—say, the pastor of some Harlem church needing a space for choir practice, or some charitable group looking for office space—what was actually going on.

This approach was certainly effective. Singer never did find a legitimate tenant willing to displace Charas. But eventually he succeeded in driving Charas out by other means. After a trial in which a jury ruled unanimously in favor of Charas and against Singer, another judge (who we all assumed must have been bribed, though, of course, we cannot prove it) voided the results on the grounds that the matter should never have been brought before a jury to begin with, and simply handed the property over to Singer. Local squatters were prepared to launch a major occupation and defense—arguing that every building given up without a fight emboldens the city to move on another one—but the Charas people ended up vetoing the plan, on the grounds that, as a community organization, their only chance of acquiring another space depended on maintaining some kind of relations with the city, and that a pitched battle would certainly make this impossible. Therefore, after a (largely ceremonial) lockdown, the building was boarded up, and—at time of writing five years later—remains empty, since its new landlord has still been unable to find anyone willing to rent it, and has not yet acquired legal authorization to tear it down. Charas, the organization, remains homeless.

In a real estate market like New York, the only alternative to occupation is to be dependent on the whim of some wealthy patron—a fate typified by the story of Blackout Books. Blackout was a collective; everyone who worked there was a volunteer. It was administered democratically and was quite successful in providing a friendly and welcoming environment for those interested in anarchism in the neighborhood. The problem was that the storefront itself was paid for by a wealthy older woman from the neighborhood, who paid the entire monthly rent. One day in 2000, the owner doubled the rent and the patron suddenly announced that she had always been a bit ambivalent about the project, since it made her, in her own way, complicit in the gentrification of the Lower East Side, and pulled out her support. Blackout had a month to create an entirely new funding base. Members of the collective tell me they probably would have been able to do so, despite the fact that the store itself certainly didn't make a profit. However, since this happened at a time of great internal dissension anyway over the relation of Blackout and the surrounding community, the effort ultimately fell apart. After about a year, Blackout reemerged, in attenuated form, as Mayday Books, in the lobby of an avant-garde theatrical space called Theater for a New City on First Avenue: largely, again, because the woman who owns the theater was willing to indulge them with an only nominal rent. However, it is an institution, again, very much dependent on one person's whim. Their patron periodically becomes irritated by the way the bookstore functions as an activist hang-out—there's pretty much always someone dropping by, reading, chatting, looking for events or information—and on several occasions has told them to pack their bags. So far, at least, such crises are usually resolved after a week or two, and those who had begun a panicked search for a new location feel they can settle down again.[21]

Alternately, one can create one's own funding base. But this in itself tends to absorb a huge amount of activists' time and energies. The Independent Media Center that opened over an Oriental rug importer on Twenty-nineth Street between Madison and Park in 2000, was, like Blackout, at first dependent on a wealthy patron—in this case the publisher of a hacker magazine who had previously been using it as a hacker space and continued to pay the rent after the IMC moved in. Eventually, as always seems to happen, the owner doubled the rent and the patron withdrew his support. The collective managed to keep the space, but only at the cost of spending about a third of each meeting on funding issues and, eventually, taking advertising in their free newspaper and otherwise compromising many of their original principles. Another particularly telling space is ABC No Rio—as I mentioned, founded as an art space and squat in 1980, and given a tacit agreement with the city that they could maintain themselves as a community center if the occupants moved out. Almost immediately upon making this agreement, city inspectors arrived and declared that the building needed eighty thousand dollars worth of repairs to be up to code and unless they could raise the money and carry out the repairs within two years, the building would be condemned, and ABC evicted. Punk shows and other benefits were held as far away as Poland to raise the money, but the result was, again, that a collective created to oppose capitalism, provide free services, and provide a general alternative to the cash economy, was forced to spend a very large part of its time on fund-raising. Squatters regularly report similar stories: even when they are legalized, building inspectors are far more stringent in their demands on the occupants than they ever are to surrounding abusive landlords.

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[21] By the time of the final edit (2008) Blackout was, in fact, expelled, and now no longer exists.

The loss first of Blackout, then of Charas, left the Loisaida activist community decentered and homeless—finding a space for large meetings during mobilizations became a continual problem. Still, the Lower East Side was never the only such cluster. Similar archipelagos of activist or activist-friendly centers and hangouts can be found in the upper 1920s, around the Independent Media Center office itself, another, rather different one, in Harlem, another quite extensive one, with social centers, squats, and community gardens, in the Bronx, another in Dumbo, and so on. But also all of them share the same sense of being enclaves under continual attack.

That same precariousness, incidentally, is felt around other activist institutions as well. Pirate radio stations are spaces won from the FCC; they tend to be shut down. Even Pacifica, the most friendly media outlet, was under continual peril after the "Christmas coup" at the very end of 2000, when it was effectively taken over by a pro-corporate faction. Many members were purged and banned, and the remaining radicals mostly marginalized. It took two years of continual mobilization, direct action, lobbying, and propaganda to finally restore it to its original board. All free or even semi-free territory has to be defended. One result is to reinforce the somewhat untidy, impromptu feel of all the spaces. Everything is slightly unfinished, or in process of construction. It's partly an aesthetic, as we'll see; but it's partly also because almost everything in such spaces is in the process of either being captured or taken away.

THREE PARTIES

Having given some small sense of activist landscapes, let me conclude this—necessarily rather schematic—chapter by placing some people in them. What follows are, again, extracts from my notebooks. It's all taken from the same weekend in spring of 2001, at the conclusion of a prolonged strike by the employees of the Museum of Modern Art in Midtown. DAN's labor working group had played a large part in supporting the official UAW picket line with puppets, street theater, secondary blockades, and propaganda, and when the employers finally caved in, we felt it was as much our victory. The celebration was held in the union offices of another somewhat offbeat UAW local, the musician's union, in their offices at midtown. Later many of us went off to a rumored rooftop rave in Queens, and the next day there was a Reclaim the Streets! Party—that is, not a street party, but a party put on by the RTS people, a fundraiser of some sort held not that far away, on Forty-second Street. At the time I was in the habit of writing up summaries of just about everything that happened; the results might give a little sense of the texture and quality of such events:

> **MOMA Victory Party**
>
> ***(UAW Musician's Union HQ, 48th Street between 8th and 9th)***
>
> I arrive fairly late, at 10PM. Most of the food is gone. The room is littered with plates of potato salad, coleslaw, potluck salads in huge wooden bowls, a box that used to contain six-foot heroes, pizza, beer. There's a band playing. Images of rats are everywhere. There's a rat piñata hanging, and another, plastic rat on the table. Rats are the universal effigy for strike actions in New York: unions share several giant inflatable rats, the largest about two stories tall, that can be delivered to picket lines around the city. Most are, on any given day, in use somewhere (they are kept, at night, in a warehouse across the river in New Jersey). The MOMA strikers even had a strike zine called *Rat Poison*, here prominently displayed. The party, when I come in, is attended by perhaps a hundred people, and many danced; perform a train to "Love Train" accompanied by whoops and joy.
>
> The setting: institutional. It reminds me pointedly of grade school. The same sorts of cheap tables and folding chairs. Church social rooms have them too, as do old radical spaces like the War Resisters League, or for that matter, Communist Party headquarters on Twenty-third Street, which is always offering itself for events and screenings, and which we sometimes use, if always with slightly embarrassment. I guess this defines cheap group space: minimal everything, folding tables, folding chairs, designs unchanged since the 1950s or

1960s. I don't know how many hours of my activist life I've spent stacking and folding chairs after meetings in churches and union halls.

The celebrants—MOMA workers and their supporters—varied wildly in shape and size, age and background, from one tiny fiftyish lady who looked like a librarian to huge palookas, and hipster types all in black with fancy glasses. (The union included everyone from painters to bookstore cashiers.)

The climax of the party was the destruction of the rat piñata, which they went after in the traditional way, with blindfolded partygoers hitting it with a stick. Much cheering. During the next train dance, one Asian guy was carrying the remains of the rat with him, thrusting it in the air in a gesture of conquest. The party didn't run too late—it had started around 6:30PM, I was told. Though the band only started up around 10, their set ran maybe an hour. It was one of those perfectly good cover bands which cover a huge range of stuff from Motown to reggae if they have to. ("That's the amazing thing about New York," notes Rufus. "Even the bad bands here are good." Except, we agree, for those Teamsters with all the electric guitars on the float at the Labor Day parade. They were kind of awful.)

Afterwards, most of the hardcore activists are heading off for a rooftop party somewhere in Queens: not exactly a rave, according to Rufus' information: the music is going to be more industrial. Clumps of six or seven keep heading off for the subway. Around midnight I end up in a car mostly occupied by activists—a wide variety, too, ranging from anarchists to labor people to diehard ISO. We get out in an industrial section of the city and follow someone named Alex, of the Lower East Side collective, who had brought along a downloaded map.

Rooftop Party in Queens

The party is being held at the home of Jessica Rockstar, known to me mainly as a member of one of the I-Witness video teams that monitor police during actions. (Her name is not actually "Rockstar," but something quite similar, and someone had been telling me she'd actually changed it officially to "Rockstar," since she feels she really ought to have been one.) JR lives in yet another of those radical semi-industrial spaces so many direct-action types seem to live in. The building is several stories high, in an area full of warehouses, parking for dump-trucks, streets full of trucks and utility vehicles of one sort or another. On the way there, we pass several large manufacturing floors, presumably carpentry or light industry, with their lights still on and workers inside, even though it's shortly after midnight on a Friday night. Streets in this part of the city are wide, often ending in fences. Viewed from above, aside from revealing yet another beautiful Manhattan cityscape, there were nothing but huge, blocklike, flat-top, warehouse/industrial spaces. This is quite far from the Navy Yards, but the buildings are of that same mold, with huge cinderblock massiveness, freight elevators, big blank hallways, occasional doors, heavy metal stairs. JR's building was five stories, with a couple of open doors. I assume our hostess lived in there somewhere. (Alex's reaction, "Oh, didn't we do labor organizing out of here at some point?") There were Nader stickers on some of the blank walls; rather incongruous with their emphasis on green, since there was nothing growing anywhere.

The roof was huge, a block's worth surely, and full of screens with mainly conceptual shapes and colors being projected on them; the sort of thing you see inside your eyes perhaps if you are on good drugs, but the drugs themselves were not much in evidence. There was officially a cover charge of five dollars, for which you get your hand stamped ("we're asking for a five dollar contribution," said the woman with the nose ring) but as at any activist event, no one was turned away if they didn't have the money. There was also a bar featuring some sort of Brazilian cane drink, also for five dollars. The music, far from industrial, was actually rather sensual and even had an instrumental version of Ministry's "Work for Love."

At midnight, such parties are only really getting off the ground. The roof was half occupied, and Rufus and most everyone else I knew immediately went off to the roof's most dramatic feature, a high platform with extremely rickety stairs, which gave an even more panoramic view of the surrounding city. I hung around with a few friends scheming and plotting things, and waiting for JR herself to appear, though, in fact, rumors that she was out with a bad flu turned out to be true, and our hostess never materialized. It only got hopping around 2AM, and I left shortly thereafter, around the time the fire-jugglers and fire-eaters and people playing with flaming hoola hoops and the like started up. According to Rufus, around 3AM, "the crowd got much younger."

Reclaim the Streets Party

(Chashama Theater on 42nd Street, between 6th and 7th)

I arrive around midnight, with several friends.

Chashama is an interesting space, an empty theater located smack in the middle of Forty-second Street, in the epicenter of the city's one-time sex district, now a kind of marginal zone between the Disney theaters and development around Times Square to the west, and the New York Public Library to the east. There is, as usual, a story behind Chashama. It turns out there is a wealthy developer who has been systematically buying up every piece of property on the block, so as to rip everything down and put up a big high-rise or something. The problem is there's one shop whose owner refuses to sell, so they're forced to wait him out. Meanwhile, the developer's daughter is friends with some RTS folk, and, since no one is using the space anyway, convinced her dad to let them use it.

I get the feeling that, for activists, the very emptiness and blankness of the space seems to appeal. There's a whole aesthetic of blank spaces associated with activist events. Much like in many of the rooms in Charas—that is, the ones not painted with colorful murals documenting key events of Latin American history—everything is empty functionality: empty rooms with often black walls, full of very large objects that are dangerous to move around—booms, trestles, machinery—or, in other rooms, white rooms containing nothing at all. It is radically different than offices, or domestic spaces, where everything is essentially created for comfort or convenience or efficiency. Such spaces already suggest their use to you. These kind don't. If they're meant for anything, it's clearly something other than what they're being used for. The same is true of most of the objects one encounters here. Everything is what you make of it. It's putty. Just, usually, very large, heavy, unwieldly putty.

Walking into Chashama that night, one first passes some kind of beached piece of a catwalk, also, an improvised little rock shrine that seems to have been used for a Living Theater production. The walls are painted black. Someone has marked out the space for a bandstand.

There were several bands lined up, but most have finished. The headliners, "German Cars Not American Homes," are playing as I come in. The name would imply it's really a band made up for this event—since this party is raising money for an anti-car action in the Village next week—though it's not really in the raver spirit you'd expect of RTS. Actually, they're almost a punk band; some songs could have been by the Sex Pistols, others more straight rock'n'roll, but very hard-driving. People are pogo-ing, bouncing, dancing frenetically, a lot of arms extended out towards the stage. I'd say perhaps about 100 to 150 people inside—but it's hard to say precisely, since it's a hot day, and since it only stopped raining half an hour before, everyone is flowing outside, chatting up pedestrians, who in this part of midtown are still flowing pretty much all night long.

RTS folk hustle by periodically, looking vaguely official. The Reverend Billy, phony preacher and performance artist, who was officially a professor at the New School at the time, was bouncing around in costume during the set, dancing occasionally, waiting to go into character. Several of the Billionaires for Bush or Gore were around, in high camp tuxedoes and evening dresses. A few others were in costume: one guy in what I think was a Kiss mask with a huge tongue, another with a fedora with a large flickering day-glow great white shark attached. Brooke was wearing a mask, one of those creepy white

Italian-style *comedia del arte* masks, but it was atop her head the whole night and never actually put it on. Mostly, though, dress was extremely informal and unpretentious.

When I came, in two activists, Simon and Brooke were working a makeshift bar in the back: three dollar beer on tap, Rolling Rock in bottles. As usual, they were no big sticklers for money, and it seemed like every third person was broke. On the other hand, maybe one out of ten threw in some kind of extremely excessive tip, so all in all, the event seems to have been a money-maker. There was also a spot to buy raffle tickets at a dollar a shot.

The main room itself was all dark, blank walls, except for the blue and red Christmas lights along the top. The hall that led off to the bathroom, however, was extremely brightly lit, bright and fluorescent, the walls covered with 8 1/2-by-11 hand-drawn cartoons and slogans ranging from beautiful works that seemed to be by professional artists, to six-year-old's stick-figures. Mostly pro-party and anti-cop themes, though varied (one sported a picture of a lovely mermaid, with the inscription "What I did on my summer vacation: I went to the mermaid parade").

Despite the punk vibe from the band, the whole event had, I noticed, an extremely friendly, open atmosphere, especially when the music ended and we could actually talk. I say hello to Jessica Rockstar, finally feeling well enough to appear. She's showing off a new tattoo on her back—or actually, it's at present a sketch, the actual tattoo to be put in later in the week—in the form of angel wings. They look like budding baby wings just starting to emerge from her back. She introduces me to a tall, guidoish fellow who explains he's just completed a musical album about A16. We fall silent as the Reverend Billy took the mic (next to him, a short silent woman stood with a bucket of coupons) to advertise the action that upcoming Friday and then perform the main event of the night—a raffle of items donated by members of RTS or sympathetic neighborhood institutions from the Lower East Side.

The Reverend Billy made an excellent emcee. The raffle items included everything from DIY books to jazz CDs, some "sustainably harvested firewood," a gift certificate to St. Mark's Bookstore, a pair of Amazonian feather earrings (won by someone from the IMC), a "bad haircut" (volunteered by some East Village salon), shiatsu sessions, and even more books. About half of them ended up being won by someone named Chuck who no one seemed to know, and since he wasn't actually there, ended up in a small pile by the stage (inevitable wordplay: "how does Chuck have all the luck?" and "who the fuck is Chuck?")

We ended with a sermon, Jimmy Swaggart style. Reverend B did his usual act, this time featuring "some asshole from New Jersey in a big Lincoln Mercury who might see such an action, come back and see their car turned into

> a home for unwed mothers, and have to actually walk places and think about his life." The real high point, though, was the end when Kelvin, of the Dumba Collective, offered to auction off his clothes. Up till then, I'd known Kelvin, who looked rather like a long-haired David Bowie, as the extremely thoughtful and good-natured activist who usually manned the absinthe bar at Complacent parties. "I have nothing except the shirt on my back," he announced, "but we can all give that." Kelvin explained that he was about to recite a rather long short story written by a French Surrealist—the only Surrealist, he noted, who had actually done something about the radical politics they all espoused and volunteered to fight with the anarchists in the Spanish Civil War—as a "spoken word" as Rev. B put it. He produced a book and began a reading—I'm not quite sure if he was reading in French or English actually, anyway no one was listening, because as soon as he did so, the Reverend began auctioning off his clothes. One sock came off first (I noticed he'd already put aside the shoes, which would be hard to replace), and then white shirt, T-shirt, pants, the other sock, boxers, until finally he was standing there in front of the microphone, reading, entirely naked. The Rev. B ended with, "How much do I hear to make him stop reading?" which produced the largest bids of all. At this point Emily—a very pretty young cartoonist in a ridiculous schoolgirl get-up, with over-the-top bloomers came out and auctioned the blouse and shirt, but giggled and ran away when someone started bidding on the bra.
>
> Then music (the DJ was already playing and scratching bits of some fundamentalist rant about a sinful strip in a big city as the Reverend Billy ended his act)—which was techno but very bouncy, and fun in spirit. The performance ended, things started breaking up. Emily came on stage again a while later to announce that at 6:30AM, some famous photographer was conducting a mass nude photoshoot on 125th Street (he's done a lot of major streets in New York filled with nudes). "By the end of the evening, I want to see most of us naked"—but despite the fact that the stairs down to the lounge also said, "lounge, clothing optional," the theme didn't really take off. Half an hour later even Kelvin was back in a red shirt and plaid pants that someone had donated, when I saw him standing on the street outside chatting with some activists who'd gone out to smoke.

One thing that emerges from all this is the constant preference for places of construction—or, sometimes, destruction—where the ordinary surfaces of life are either being patched together or torn down. (Black Blocs, as we'll see, have love of construction sites, and finding improvised uses for industrial fencing, dumpsters, and the like). Industrial environments. The idea seems to be, to couch the matter in appropriately Situationist terms, to poke behind the spectacle and hover instead as much as possible around the grimiest, most unlovely places where the spectacle itself is produced; there to create one's own spectacles, perhaps, but collectively, transparently, in a participatory fashion without the split between backstage and onstage, between workshop and shop floor, that is the original form of all alienation. One anarchist lives in a squatted loft apartment over the workshop in which Star Wars action figures are produced; the place looks half like a factory, half like a stage set. Three DAN veterans live in a loft amidst a row of warehouses, full of masks and elaborate costumes. Everything on the walls, or on display, can be taken down and worn. Another activist house is on an otherwise abandoned, overgrown street in Brooklyn between a lumberyard and a municipal parking lot, where school buses are tucked away—all these are things you're not normally supposed to remember even exist. Most rooms in Charas or Chashama are theaters where there is no formal stage, every place is stage and behind the scenes simultaneously.

Colin Campbell (1987) once suggested that one reason bohemians have always hated the bourgeoisie is that the former see themselves as people who have abandoned comforts for the pursuit of pleasure, whereas the bourgeoisie are people who have done exactly the opposite. However glib, there is a kind of truth here. Campbell also argues that bohemians are, effectively, the avant-garde of consumerism, exploring new forms of pleasure that can be commodified in the next generation, and here I think he misses the point. The point is that this pleasure is, specifically, at the point of creation: the pleasure of destroying the very boundaries that categories like production and consumption create. Pleasure in production is never comfortable. But it often can feel all the more thrilling for that fact.

Conclusion, With Some Notes on the Ideological Effects of Government Regulation

The global anti-capitalist movement that debuted, in the US, in Seattle at the very end of 1999, came at a very peculiar historical juncture. It was the time of the "Washington Consensus," a moment of capitalism's complete ideological hegemony. During the Cold War, it was only opponents of capitalism who really called it that; capitalism's proponents tended to prefer to talk about "democracy" or "freedom," or "private enterprise." It was only in the 1980s that capitalism began to dare to speak its name. Ten years later, in the wake of the Soviet collapse, it had achieved such an ideological power that its exponents were arguing that supercharged, free-market capitalism was the only possible economic model for anything, and would remain so for the rest of human history. That the next great global social movement would define itself as anti-capitalist was in its way inevitable; as a movement of the first generation of young people brought up in a world without alternatives; it was literally all there was against which to rebel. Insofar as it became a revolutionary movement, it was not, demographically, fundamentally different from revolutionary movements of the past. As a result, it had to confront most of the same dilemmas. Before proceeding, let me summarize them. Such dilemmas, I think, exist even in moments of spontaneous insurrection, but they tend to become ever more salient the more long-term a revolutionary struggle tends to become:

> In any revolutionary movement, there will tend to be a tension between those who have the most resources with which to carry out acts of rebellion, and those who have the most reason to rebel.
>
> Often, as a result, the make-up of revolutionary groups tends to combine upwardly mobile children of working class or otherwise disenfranchised families, and downwardly mobile (often voluntarily downwardly mobile) children of the elite, since these two groups are most likely to produce individuals who both wish to see radical change, and have the social, cultural, and economic resources to be able to engage in effective long-term struggle.
>
> All this tends to exacerbate another, more conceptual, tension within any revolutionary movement: the degree to which it is inspired not simply by a rejection of the structure of a given social order—that is, the distribution of those things people want or need (wealth, honor, security, food, and so on), and what they have to do to get them—but a rejection of the standards that define what people *ought* to want. That is to say, tensions arise from the degree to which the movement is based in a broad rejection of existing standards of value. One can define alienation, in turn, as the subjective experience of this: what one feels when one's conception of value—of what one feels it is appropriate to desire from life, of what should be important or worthwhile in it—is radically out of sync with prevailing social standards. The problem here is always the tension between this sort of politics of alienation, and more immediate problems of oppression: radical exclusion from basic necessities, those means of existence that need to be to some degree guaranteed in order to be able to pursue any other forms of value to begin with.
>
> In the United States, these issues become infinitely more complicated, and often explosive, insofar as they inevitably become inflected by questions of race.

Those who participated in this movement were first written off as naïve utopians or flat-out lunatics. This is par for the course as well, though one might say the dismissal, this time around, has been much more absolute, and enduring, than usual—especially in the United States. Perhaps it's not surprising, considering the combination of the collapse of "actually existing socialism" and the fact that so many revolutionaries consider themselves anarchists. Still, I think we might do well to think about what it is that makes anarchism, and revolutionary dreams more generally, seem so unrealistic to non-anarchists. The ideological effect operates in a manner far more subtle than one would at first suspect.

Ideology, it's often said, is at its most effective when it makes certain social arrangements—ones that might well be arranged differently—seem natural and inevitable. Insofar as the market, the state, or the patriarchal family, seem so obvious that anyone who suggests an alternative to them appears—precisely like our revolutionaries—at best an unrealistic dreamer, at worst, insane, we are dealing with a classic ideological effect. And it's certainly true that capitalism has always been unusually effective at this game. It does so largely by defining itself not in terms of wage labor, or any relations of production, or for that matter even capital, but as simply a combination of private property rights and self-interested exchange. Both of these can then be posited as universal, indeed, natural phenomena: they combine the presumably natural desire to own things, and what Adam Smith (1776) famously called people's "natural propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another." Time cards and limited liability can thus be seen somehow as more complex emanations from this omnipresent base. Some of the power of this view can be gauged by the rhetoric one often heard after the fall of the Soviet Union, when analysts seemed to shift, within only a matter of months, from arguing that a command economy would never be able to enter the computer age, to arguing that an economy not based on the profit motive "simply couldn't work," since it flies in the face of universal human dispositions—leaving one to wonder how the Soviet Union could ever have existed for seventy-two years to begin with.

According to this logic, anarchism—as a form of libertarian communism—is not just unrealistic, it's contradiction in terms. Communism can only take the form of state control. Since any free economy will always take the form of a market, any attempt to create collective alternatives will either founder, since they fly in the face of human nature, or, alternately, have to end up being enforced by state coercion. It is assumed that state and market are opposite principles. This kind of argument can be traced back at least to the nineteenth century—back when it was called "liberalism," and not yet "neoliberalism"—in authors like Herbert Spencer, who argued that the state would eventually dissolve away entirely, as it was replaced by free contractual relations based on market principles. Emile Durkheim (1893) long ago pointed out the fallacy here: Spencer's predictions were in no way borne out by the empirical evidence. In fact, he found that as free contractual arrangements increased in number, states actually became much larger: there had to be an endless elaboration of new legislation and administrative mechanisms to monitor and enforce them all—what he referred to as the "non-contractual element in contract." Modern police forces, in fact, were created precisely in the heyday of the "free contract" (Neocleous 2000), and they were primarily concerned with the protection of private property, suppression of traditions of street mobilization and unruly forms of proletarian sociability, and even the regulation of the labor market.

When one examines what really does create practical problems when anarchists try to start creating "new society in the shell of the old," this is precisely what one finds. Certainly, there are always complaints about "accountability issues," as activists like to put it—how to make sure volunteer workers actually show up for their shifts, or activists actually perform the tasks they volunteered for in a meeting. But I've never heard of a project like a cooperative bookstore, or of bicycle shop, collapsing as a result. Instead, the one thing the immediate, day-to-day experience of people trying to create alternatives really brings home is the degree to which almost everything, in America, is surrounded by endless and intricate government regulation. The coercive force of the state is everywhere. Most of all, it adheres in anything large, heavy, and economically valuable; in any valuable object, in other words, that cannot be simply hidden away: in cars, in boats, in buildings, in machinery.

Let me provide a simple illustration.

At one point in 2002, someone gave the NYC Direct Action Network a car. It was an old car that the donor had no real use for; he handed it over with all the appropriate papers in the glove compartment. We quickly discovered that a "DAN car" was basically a legal impossibility. In the eyes of the law, a car must have an owner. That owner is normally presumed to be an individual, not a collectivity. It is of course possible for a car to be owned by a collectivity, but that collective entity has to be one recognized by the state. This means that, unless the car is owned by the government itself (or a foreign government), the collectivity has to be some sort of corporation. One could imagine DAN as a kind of nonprofit corporation, but actually, to be legally recognized as a nonprofit requires a great deal of paperwork. It also requires that one at least pretend to have a certain form of organization, with a director and various responsible parties willing to fill out the paperwork. Governments almost invariably insist the groups they are dealing with are hierarchically organized. The IMC, for example, encounters this problem all the time. One doesn't even have to be dealing directly with the government; one need only deal regularly with organizations that operate within the formal economy (that the state monitors and regulates). In doing so, one immediately enters into a world where all collectivities are assumed to have certain positions: a president, a board of directors, an editor-in-chief. The same goes, actually, for any financial transaction that isn't carried out in cash: in order for it to be possible for potential contributors to write checks to DAN, for example, the group would have had to be entirely differently organized, at least on paper. At any rate, open-ended networks of activists cannot legally own cars.

Of course one can just pretend. This is what the IMC does, and it is essentially what we did with the car: technically, title was transferred not to DAN, but to one member of it, Moose, who thus became the point person for the "DAN car working group." But this made it much harder to manage the car collectively. In theory, there were two others in the working group as well. Still, everyone knew that, if Moose was not driving and the car was pulled over, paperwork would have to be produced; and, if the car was towed (which it quickly was, since the former owner had unpaid tickets), only Moose could get it out. This meant he had to front all the money, and that, in turn, meant the rest of us did, even though we did help to try to raise the money ourselves, tend to treat it more and more like his car.

I should point out that none of this would have happened if someone had given DAN, say, a potted palm, or a bicycle. Or even an expensive computer. No doubt there are on the books all sorts of similar laws and regulations concerning the ownership and transfer of books, computers, and potted palms, but they are so rarely enforced most of us have no idea what they even are, and for this there's a very simple reason. Books and potted palms and computers are relatively small; they are quite easy to hide; as a result, there's no way for the government to effectively regulate them. The fact that a car is large, heavy, and cannot be easily hidden (at least, if one is actually going to use it) means it can be continually monitored by a branch of the state whose job it is precisely to monitor cars—their speed, location, registration status, whether their driver is licensed, and so on—and enforce the endless very detailed laws that regulate such matters—laws which, I again emphasize, presume all sorts of things about what sort of social groups can and can't have legal standing. These rules are enforced by the threat of force. Armed representatives of the state can pull over your car at any time and check your papers, and if this happens, the occupants would not do well to talk back. If your car is towed, and you try to simply take it back without paying the fine, state representatives will use force to stop you. The fact that the DAN car turned into an immediate problem, and, after several months, was abandoned was not proof that egalitarian collectives cannot manage property (human history is full of examples of egalitarian collectives successfully managing property). It is, in fact, much more a testimony to the immediate effectiveness of state violence in enforcing a certain vision of human possibilities.

What is true of a car or boat is, of course. even more true of a building. There are endless regulations concerning how buildings can and must be maintained. Squatters invariably complain that the first thing city representatives do, if squatters do somehow win legal title to their building, is to send inspectors to demand every possible repair to keep the building up to code: demands which, these same squatters always point out, inspectors almost never demand of absentee landlords, no matter how loudly their tenants beg for them. Some of this work can, and usually is, taken on within the alternative economy: there are always squatter plumbers, or electricians, willing to contribute their services. Some of the materials can often be salvaged or reclaimed. But not all of them. The result is, as I mentioned above in the case of ABC No Rio, that one is plunged into the formal economy in a very traumatic way, and forced to spend much of one's time and energy on organizing benefit concerts, or fund-raisers, or selling T-shirts, or otherwise raising money. But, again, this is in no way an effect of economic imperatives. It's an effect of threats of violence. If one did not comply, armed men would come and expel one from the building. If you sell a T-shirt, in turn, matters have to follow a certain legal form, because one has to levy sales tax. If you want to apply for grants, you need to register as a nonprofit.

What I want to emphasize here is the ideological effect. I will call it the "reality effect." Government regulations essentially enforce a certain model of society, in which individual actors or hierarchically organized companies seek profits, and anyone who wishes to organize themselves differently—around any sort of conception of common good—needs to either be part of the state apparatus, or to register with it as a nonprofit corporation. In theory, every aspect of "civil society" is so regulated. Basically, the *only* areas that are entirely off-limits to this sort of regulation backed by force are communicative ones: speech, discussion in meetings, exchanges on the Internet, etc.[22] As soon as one enters the world of material objects, regulations abound. And the larger, heavier, and more visible the objects, the more those regulations tend to be enforced. The obvious result is to leave people with the feeling that radical politics is unrealistic. It's all an ephemeral dreamworld that melts away the moment it hits material reality. As soon as it enters the "real world," the world of large heavy things like buildings and machinery and so on, it all seems to be proved unrealistic. In fact, this is really just because heavy physical objects are so much easier to regulate. As a result, large, heavy, valuable objects tend to be surrounded by threats of physical force that back up a certain ideology of how people are expected to interact, and if they don't, they tend to be taken away from you. The objects that seem the most self-evidently real are in fact those most surrounded by forces and abstractions.

To anticipate an argument I will make in the conclusion: consider for a moment some of the uses of the word "real." One can speak of the forms of property that are easiest to regulate—the largest, the hardest to hide, therefore, the most effectively surrounded by the threat of violence—as “real estate,” “real property” as opposed to movables. Note that “real” property is in no sense more empirically real than movables: in fact, insofar as it involves complex abstractions like air rights, one might say that compared with, say, a tomato, it is decided less so.[23] But one can also talk about “realpolitik,” or political “realism.” In international relations, for instance, to be “Realist” (as opposed to an “Institutionalist”) means proceeding from the assumption that nations will not hesitate to use force in pursuit of their own national interests. Once again, this has nothing to do with recognizing what we like to think of as empirical reality: “nations” with collective “interests” are purely imaginary constructs. They become “real” when they threaten to send in the army. The “reality” one recognizes when one is being a “realist” is purely that of violence. Yet it’s precisely that collapse of the effects of violence into the very apparent solidity of the object that produces the reality effect I’m talking about, and makes social alternatives seem so unrealistic. Abstractions like law and the state attach themselves, by threat of force, particularly to the largest, heaviest objects—the things that seem most empirically “real.”

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[22] Walter Benjamin (1978) was very concerned about slander laws since speech is the only area in which state violence had previously not entered in.

All this might make it possible to understand the anarchist love of industrial settings, construction sites, backstage spaces, and the like in a slightly different way. What’s being “detourned” there—to use a somewhat bastardized version of the Situationist expression—is precisely that reality effect, in order, I think, to propose another one, in which the ultimate reality is not the ability to deploy violence, the power to destroy, but rather, the power of creativity itself.

I will return to this theme in the conclusion.

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[23] It is also etymologically derived not from Latin “res” but from Spanish “real,” “royal,” ultimately belonging to the king, and hence under the jurisdiction of state power.

CHAPTER 7:
MEETINGS

In Part I, I tried to give the reader some sense of how an endless chain of minor meetings can build first to mass convergences, then to mass actions. These meetings are important. In a way, they are more important even than the actions themselves, since actions involve confrontations with hostile forces, and meetings are pure zones of social experiment, spaces in which activists can treat one another as they feel people ought to treat each other, and to begin to create something of the social world they wish to bring out.

This chapter is largely concerned with the New York City Direct Action Network. After a brief introduction to the notion of the affinity group and some related concepts, and some background on the history of NYC DAN, I'll outline DAN's internal process. Rather than map it out myself, though, I thought it would be more interesting for the reader to learn things more or less as I did: so I have reproduced the text of the first consensus/facilitation training I ever attended, held for new members of DAN in the spring of 2000. There follow some reflections on how the ideals of behavior lying behind consensus come to be defined.

This is all the first half of the chapter, which maps out how consensus ought to work in principle. The second half of the chapter is about problems: difficult racial and gender dynamics, tensions related to social class, and other factors that almost invariably create strains in activist groups. Consensus process operates on a kind of institutionalized generosity of spirit. In a meeting with fellow activists, it is one's responsibility to give others' the benefit of the doubt for honesty and good intentions. In most circumstances this principle works remarkably well in creating actual honest and well-intentioned behavior. Where it falls short is precisely where it encounters what activists would call deeply internalized forms of oppression. Racism, sexism, class bias, homophobia, all these are forms of violence that are both seen as absolute evils, but also as so deeply internalized that one simply cannot expect people to police themselves. What's more, they tend to be entangled in one another in ways that make it very difficult to combat all of them equally at the same time. The centerpiece of the last part of the chapter, then, is an extended case study, drawn from an actual DAN meeting, illustrating just how difficult it can be to deal with such issues within the framework of a large, consensus-based group. It centers on efforts of the DAN women's caucus to try to create some mechanisms to control sexist behavior, but at the same time, on the strenuous opposition to their efforts by Dennis, a slightly crazy, very working class DAN member. I end with some notes on the sometimes even greater problems that ensue when groups based on principles of autonomy and direct democracy have to engage, on an ongoing basis, with others that are organized on more hierarchical principles.

SECTION I: BACKGROUND

Affinity Groups

I start with affinity groups since these might be considered the elementary particles of voluntary association. Essentially, they are just small groups of people who feel they share something important in common, and decide to work together on a common project. The term itself derives from the Spanish *grupos de afinidad* which again, originally referred to clusters of friends (a common synonym was *tertulias*, groups of drinking buddies or young people used to hanging out together in cafés), but which in the 1920s became the basic organizational unit of the Spanish anarchist confederation, the FAI. When the first large-scale consensus-based groups came together during the antinuclear campaigns of the early 1980s, the base unit was always assumed to be affinity groups.

According to the ACT UP civil disobedience training manual:

> Affinity groups are self-sufficient support systems of about 5 to 15 people. A number of affinity groups may work together toward a common goal in a large action, or one affinity group might conceive of and carry out an action on its own. Sometimes, affinity groups remain together over a long period of time, existing as political support and/or study groups, and only occasionally participating in actions.[1]

During an action, each affinity group has to allocate a certain number of roles:

> Within an affinity group, there are a whole range of different roles that its members can perform. A lot of these roles will be determined by the aim or *rai-*

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[1] http://www.actupny.org/documents/CDdocuments/Affinity.html; accessed July 31 2004.

> *son d'etre* of the AG, but could include a Media Spokesperson, to either talk to / deal with news media, a quick decision facilitator, 1st Aid to take care of people that are hurt, a Spokesperson to convey the affinity group's ideas and decisions to other AGs, a Legal Observer, and Arrest support.[2]

The minimal version I learned in DAN trainings held that at the very least, there should be: (1) a facilitator to organize group decision-making, (2) someone who had gone to at least one medical training, (3) someone who had gone to a legal training. The legal person ordinarily does everything possible to avoid getting arrested, so as to be able to keep track of everyone else. It's the legal person who also keeps the list of who will need someone to feed the cat if they're arrested, who needs someone to lie to their boss, and so on. In addition one might have someone to handle supplies, communications, or other needs, and finally, a spoke.

The spoke speaks for the group in larger meetings, for example, when affinity groups form larger "clusters," or, of course, in "spokescouncils." The latter, held before large actions, can often involve thousands of people—far too many to allow everyone to speak. A spoke is not, however, a representative. Normally, spokes do not have the power to make decisions in the group's name, they are conduits for information; hence, at a spokescouncil, while "empowered spokes" sit in the center in a great circle, the rest of the affinity group is expected to be on hand, whispering back and forth to one another, and eventually, conveying instructions. In principle the spokes are quite literally like the spokes of a great wheel.

When affinity groups endure from action to action, they become hard to distinguish from collectives, minimal groups that operate on egalitarian terms. There are, certainly, groups that play both roles, that during most of the year work as media collectives, or support groups, or pamphleteers, or feminist projects, and then show up at actions as affinity groups. There are also affinity groups that exist just as networks of friends during most of the year, but can be mobilized at important moments: there were two such affinity groups in New York DAN, for instance, the Flying Squirrels for Freedom and the Subway Liberation Front—arguably, three, if one includes Harper's Ferry, though the latter was largely based in the New York IWW.

In this chapter, I am not going to be talking much about meetings of such relatively small and intimate groups, often seen as more informal and "organic" than groups like DAN. But neither am I going to dwell much on spokescouncils—the reader has already got a sense of those in Part I. Rather, I will be focusing on DAN, an attempt to create a more permanent structure along the same lines. From the very beginning, DAN was wracked by uncertainties as to exactly how that could be done. Should DAN take the form of a permanent spokescouncil for existing collectives and affinity groups (the "convergence model"), or should it have meetings open to everyone, and its own working groups? Was it a network of groups or a group in its own right? None of these questions were definitively resolved. DAN always remained a little bit of both, and therefore, its structure was always something of a problem.

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[2] http://www.starhawk.org/activism/affinitygroups.html, accessed July 31 2004.

The Rise and Fall of Continental DAN

On the face of it, the attempt to create a continental Direct Action Network seems an obvious failure. The idea of creating a continental network of direct action groups arose in a heady burst of enthusiasm, after the startling success of the WTO actions in Seattle in November 1999. Over the course of the next year or so, the network grew apace. But DAN quickly began losing many of its most enthusiastic early members after a frustrating series of less-successful actions; and, within a few years, it had effectively dissolved. This is the obvious way to tell the story. There is, however, another one. When I first got involved with DAN, almost everyone emphasized that they didn't expect the group to be around forever. DAN was not, itself, going to bring about a revolution. Rather, most insisted that DAN existed to disseminate a certain vision of direct democracy, to provide a model of egalitarian decision-making processes that would eventually become standard practice for everyone interested in directly confronting the state and capitalism. Once it had done so, there would be no reason for DAN to exist. In a sense, this is precisely what happened, and much more rapidly than anyone anticipated. Within two or three years, DAN, as a formal entity, was gone, but in another sense it was everywhere, since at least among direct action-oriented group, some version of its model of organization had become pretty much universal.

The idea for the original Direct Action Network actually came from a Ruckus Camp—an activist training camp—in 1999, and it was created to coordinate what was then referred to as N30, the actions against the WTO ministerial held in Seattle on November 30, 1999. The Ruckus Society, which organizes these camps, is an NGO, but it's a very unusual one that specializes in training young people in the techniques of nonviolent civil disobedience and direct action.[3] It organizes camps before almost any major mobilization, usually in some obscure, beautiful, forested place, with trainings on everything from how to perform banner-drops to overcoming forms of unconscious racism. At this camp, an idea emerged, for a decentralized network that would coordinate the various affinity groups expected to take part in N30 along directly democratic lines. The model worked so well that even before the action, some were suggesting keeping it up in some form afterwards, but in the immediate aftermath of the actions, this proved hard to talk about because so many of the key figures were in jail. Those still outside threw together a somewhat haphazard Interim Body, charged to "spend the next three months working with their local groups to develop a proposal for a future Continental DAN that would operate under the principles of non-hierarchy, decentralization, local autonomy, and direct democracy."[4] It was made up of twelve regional spokes who went home, consulted with their local groups, engaged in weekly conference calls, and then finally returned to Seattle in late February 2000 to draft a CDAN charter.[5]

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[3] This is an extremely rare phenomenon. With a few spectacular exceptions, like Ruckus or Greenpeace, NGOs rarely themselves carry out or train others in direct action.

The big question, at first, was whether this would be a means of communication, or a real decision-making body. Many felt the latter would mean infringing on local group autonomy. Others insisted that, as the CDAN web page put it, "we should put all our efforts into constructing a model for what a truly decentralized, confederated, directly democratic organization could be like"—and that was particularly important to demonstrate this could be done on a continental scale. That was the view that won out, with the proviso that all initiatives were to come up from the locals, and any local group was free to withdraw at any time. So CDAN was to function as a kind of spokescouncil. This, in turn, raised the question of principles of unity, since technically, members of a group could block proposals on the basis of those principles. Here the spokes came up with a list essentially modeled on the People's Global Action (PGA) "hallmarks," and, like them, carefully crafted to embody anarchist principles without, however, ever referring to any particular political ideology. The idea was to leave things maximally open, so as to be able to maintain the broad coalition between anarchists (particularly those of what I've been calling the "small a" variety), environmentalists, NGO and labor activists that had proved so effective in Seattle. Everything was thus kept intentionally brief:

> **CONTINENTAL DAN MISSION**
>
> We are a continental network committed to overcoming corporate globalization and all forms of oppression. We are part of a growing movement united in common concern for justice, freedom, peace, and sustainability of all life, and a commitment to take direct action to realize radical visionary change.
>
> **CONTINENTAL DAN PRINCIPLES OF UNITY**
>
> DAN adopts the following Principles of Unity inspired by and derived from those of the international People's Global Action Network:

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[4] [nyc-dan] CDAN ratification draft, Date: Mon, 15 May 2000.

[5] They included Boston, New York, Philly, DC, the South East, Chicago, Arizona, LA, San Francisco, Northern CA, Seattle and Vancouver; one legal team spokes; and one labor liaison.

> A rejection of neoliberal politics and institutions which promote socially and environmentally destructive globalization.
>
> A confrontational attitude toward undemocratic institutions including governments and corporations in which capital is the only real policy maker.
>
> A call to nonviolent direct action, civil disobedience, and the construction of local alternatives by local people.
>
> An organizational philosophy based on decentralization, direct democracy, and local autonomy.
>
> A rejection of all forms of hierarchy, oppression, and exploitation.
>
> A commitment to working in solidarity locally and internationally to build a popular movement for radical social change and global justice.

PGA, however, was—as Olivier de Marcellus pointed out in Chapter 1—an extremely loose network. It had to be, being made up of groups that were not only scattered across the globe, but that ranged in size from tiny squatters' collectives in Barcelona, to organizations like the KRRS, with ten million members. PGA, in itself, was little more than a set of principles, and a largely informal network of communications. DAN, being made up of units of approximately the same size and nature, could aim to become something more.

The problem was that it was never clear there was anything, on a continental level, that really needed to be coordinated. Getting word out about mass mobilizations, or distributing images and literature, could be accomplished fairly easily via the Internet; transportation and the organization of convergences could be arranged by informal networks that already existed; the dozen or so spokes who participated in the biweekly CDAN conference calls soon came to realize that, except when new groups wanted to join the network, there really weren't any decisions that needed to be made. CDAN was an organizational experiment that existed mainly for the sake of its own existence. Or, to put it more graciously, its purpose was to put a name and organizational identity on informal networks that would have operated just as well without one. And it soon became clear that name was a very mixed blessing.

Granted, the name "DAN" had absorbed much of the prestige of the actions in Seattle. But even this brought problems. Seattle DAN had coordinated a complex series of blockades and lockdowns involving five or six thousand activists, all of whom had agreed to a code of nonviolent conduct that was widely posted at spokescouncils and convergence centers. Even in Seattle, though, there were those who didn't agree with this definition of nonviolence, or who objected to the notion of some group claiming the authority to impose a code of conduct to begin with. Several hundred anarchists, many drawn from West Coast collectives and affinity groups that had been involved in tree sits and other environmental campaigns in the region, refused to attend the DAN spokescouncils and became the core of the famous Seattle Black Bloc. On the second day of the action, after the meetings had been effectively shut down by blockades, and the police began attacking the blockaders, the Black Bloc began a campaign of targeted property destruction. Starbucks and Citibank windows were smashed, Niketown invaded. Images flashed around the world. In the media, the moment windows started breaking, the lockdowns and blockades basically disappeared, so that the Black Bloc actions—which began only well after the police had started beating, gassing, and pepper-spraying the DAN affinity groups—became, retroactively, the justification for everything the police had done beforehand. DAN spokespeople complained indignantly to the press that they had nothing to do with the Bloc, and even openly condemned the "vandalism." Some even claimed they had pointed out Black Bloc'ers to police for arrest.

As one might imagine, the situation led to all sorts of vituperation and resentment between activists.

In what became the standard media version of the event, the Black Bloc became "the anarchists," represented as a "violent" fringe from Eugene, Oregon, looking forward to the complete destruction of technological civilization. DAN or similar groups essentially disappeared, merged into "nonviolent protesters" presumably marching around with signs. All of this obscures what was really a quarrel between anarchists about the definition of nonviolence. The Black Bloc'ers were, in effect, proposing that "violence" should be defined as causing harm or suffering to living creatures; by this standard, trashing an owner-operated café might arguably be defined as "violent," since it undermined the owner's livelihood—but trashing a Starbucks could not. Many made this argument quite explicitly. Many on the other side, including such nationally known figures as Medea Benjamin of Global Exchange and pagan anarchists like Starhawk, either took issue with the logic, or argued it was irrelevant: the public sees property destruction as violent, it gives the police justification to attack everyone indiscriminately, and it allows the media to focus incessantly on images of destruction and ignore the actual message the protesters were trying to convey. Defenders of Black Bloc tactics replied that this is not a zero sum game: were it not for the property destruction, the media would not have reported the event at all. Spokesmen for Seattle DAN accused the Black Bloc of violating solidarity by refusing to take part in meetings or abide by the agreed-on code of conduct. Black Bloc activists argued that they had never agreed on the code of conduct to begin with, and accused pacifists of the outrageous lack of solidarity of turning them in to the police.

Arguments about property destruction, in turn, came to stand in for a host of other questions: mainly questions about organizational autonomy. One can see this quite clearly by looking at what happened within DAN itself. The DAN chapters operating in different cities soon came to be classified into two broad tendencies: anti-corporate, or anti-capitalist. The former tended to be more reformist in orientation, more oriented towards the civil disobedience tradition and suspicious of more militant styles of direct action, more interested in appealing to the middle classes around concepts like fair trade and green consumerism. The latter were more explicitly anarchist and revolutionary. The most prominent examples of the former tendency were Seattle DAN and LA DAN, both of which continued to be dominated by NGO activists or, anyway, included many who straddled the line between the NGO and anarchist worlds. As a result they tended to maintain a hostile attitude towards militant tactics, arguing they would alienate potential allies like labor groups or communities of color. Often they took active measures to keep Black Blocs away from their actions. A number of allied groups that were not formally part of the DAN network, such as Mobilization for Global Justice (MobGlob) in Washington DC, or the New England Global Action Network (NEGAN) had much the same composition and took much the same attitude. The vast majority of groups that were within the DAN network, however, including NYC DAN, the Philadelphia Direct Action Group (PDAG), San Francisco and Humboldt County DAN, Chicago DAN, and many others, were plainly anti-capitalist. They had little NGO participation, but were made up instead mainly of independent activists and members of local anarchist collectives—if, for the most part, anarchists of the small-a variety. In pretty much every case, these anti-capitalist branches ended up accepting the Seattle Black Bloc's definition of nonviolence and, often, working closely with collectives that favored Black Bloc tactics.

On the East Coast, especially, many of the tensions coming out of Seattle were patched up over the course of the next three major mobilizations. During the April 16 blockades of the IMF and World Bank meetings in Washington, organized by DAN, there was a huge Black Bloc ("the Revolutionary Anti-Capitalist Bloc") of perhaps two thousand people. They didn't participate in the DAN spokescouncil, but at their own spokes consensed on a policy of avoiding property destruction and supporting the DAN lockdowns.[6] The bloc spent most of the time building barricades and confronting police. During the actions against the Republican Convention in Philadelphia on August 1, there was at least tacit coordination: the bloc (here dubbed the "Revolutionary Anti-Authoritarian Bloc") agreed to draw off police attention by moving through one part of the city while lockdowns, organized by DAN and a coalition of other groups, were being set up in another. The inaugural protests in January 2001 proved another milestone. On discovering that the Justice Action Network (JAN), a local DC group hastily thrown together for the protests, was not planning for any direct action at all, most members of the New York and Philadelphia branches of DAN ended up abandoning their erstwhile allies and joining the Revolutionary Anti-Authoritarian Bloc, which crashed through the barricades surrounding the presidential parade route and briefly stopped Bush's motorcade during what was afterwards dubbed the "Battle of Naval Memorial."

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[6] This was in part because of widespread criticism of the Seattle Black Bloc for breaking windows on streets occupied by street blockades, and then, when the police arrived, running away rather than supporting their fellow activists.

Similar things were happening on the West Coast. While groups like Global Exchange and the Ruckus Society—essentially NGOs which (like Greenpeace in an earlier day) were willing to employ direct action when they felt it tactically appropriate—continued to isolate themselves by publicly condemning property destruction as "violence" (a position that, if nothing else, they were forced to take so as not to alienate their funding base). Starhawk and others associated with the Pagan Cluster, an autonomous group, gradually established a tacit alliance with local Black Blocs. By the time of Québec, in early 2001, the anti-corporate DANs had essentially disappeared. Still, in the eyes of most Black Bloc-style anarchists, the name "DAN" was indelibly tied with those condemning property destruction in Seattle. No matter what positions DAN activists took, the name was viewed at best with suspicion, often with hostility, within the hardcore squatter scene, or those who had long since been working with infoshops and Food Not Bombs or similar projects, and who, often as not, saw the DAN activists as media-happy upstarts "with their cell phones and their laptops," as one put it, elbowing their way into an established scene.[7]

This was the real danger, I think, with trying to put a name on informal networks. In direct action circles, named groups have a tendency to accumulate bad associations. Many see any effort to formalize networks or coalitions as attempts to create a de facto leadership structure, to put certain individuals in a position to "speak for the group" and take credit for other's actions or achievements. Even those who don't see things this way tend to adopt a system of moral accounting whereby it's extremely difficult for groups to accumulate credits, and easy to accumulate debits. The same thing happened when DAN tried to establish alliances with radical groups based in communities of color: insensitive, obnoxious, or racist behavior by individual members tended to be angrily remembered, and identified with DAN as a group; dramatic acts of solidarity and self-sacrifice tended to be remembered as acts of particular individuals. Over time, then, the name became a liability. Since there was little reason to maintain the network, by late 2001, CDAN effectively collapsed. Most of the local DANs were to follow suit soon after or, more often, go back to being the largely informal networks from which they arose.

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[7] A number of examples can be found in *The Black Bloc Papers* (David & X 2002).

About New York DAN Specifically

For most of the 1980s and 1990s, the greatest energy in the direct action scene in New York City was around the AIDS crisis. By the end of the Reagan years, ACT UP was holding weekly meetings with hundreds of participants, and engaging in a whole range of actions across the city: protests, sit-ins, lockdowns, banner-drops, and so on. In the 1990s New York also saw one of the major national chapters of Love and Rage, a project to create a nationwide revolutionary anarchist network, built up largely around a weekly newspaper of the same name. Like so many such groups, Love & Rage fell into internal conflicts and eventually dissolved over issues of white privilege in 1998.

By early 2000, ACT UP was a shadow of its former self, Love and Rage was gone.[8] The people who came together to become the core of DAN were mainly drawn from newer groups like Reclaim the Streets (RTS), the Lower East Side Collective, and, to some extent, the New York Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The first was a loose collective inspired by a very famous PGA-affiliated group of the same name active in London. In the UK, RTS came out of the convergence of anti-road campaigns with the rave scene, and was famous for organizing wild street parties, blockading highways, and otherwise organizing around the broader theme of the reappropriation of public space. In New York, RTS had been born from the Lower East Side Collective in 1997. It had its main base in artsy, bohemian circles in Williamsburg, and had already organized several—smaller-scale—illegal street parties of its own. RTS, in turn, overlapped with Times Up!, a group that organized monthly Critical Mass bicycle rides. The Lower East Side Collective had been especially active in the defense of community gardens and other campaigns against gentrification. The Wobblies, in turn, were more working class in background and orientation, and aimed to organize workplaces, though, compared to the West Coast, they were relative newcomers, still at the time engaged in an ultimately fruitless campaign to unionize Borders Books.[9]

In other words, the people who became the core of NYC DAN were not, for the most part, drawn either from the NGOs that had mainly concerned themselves with issues of global neoliberalism up to that time, or from the network of explicitly anarchist institutions, centered on the squatter scene, Blackout Books, Food Not Bombs, and so on, that had existed in New York at least since the time of the Tompkins Square riots in the late 1980s. This is not to say that representatives of either were not interested in the project, especially at first. The original circular, sent out on all New York activist listservs, read:

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[8] Many of its former members had become Maoists—many began working with SLAM (Student Liberation Action Movement), a radical group that had taken control of the student government at Hunter College.

[9] Since 2004 or 2005, when the IWW began its Starbucks campaign, all this has changed and the union has grown dramatically, gaining shop floors and attracting many immigrant laborers as well. All this happened later, though.

> Join the NYC Direct Action Network!
> Jan 31, 2000 20:45 PST
> [here's an email announcement to copy & forward to your lists]
>
> PLEASE FORWARD FAR & WIDE
>
> Building on the successes of the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle, a diverse coalition of New York City activist groups are coming together in mutual aid. We are creating a network to support each other's movements and facilitate mass mobilizations on a diversity of issues, beginning with actions on April 16-17 against the World Bank and International Monetary Fund…

The first meetings were extraordinarily widely attended: with just about every radical group or collective taking part. The initial vision was for DAN to act as a kind of broad umbrella group, bringing together everything from Food Not Bombs to radical queer support groups. One of the first big debates, in fact, was about whether to run DAN itself on a spokescouncil basis. Since this was not an organization but a network, Brooke and others proposed that DAN General meetings should consist only of a gathering of empowered spokes from working groups and existing collectives. Others felt that would make it impossible for DAN to fulfill one of its most obvious functions: of providing a place for new people to connect to the activist scene and plug into collectives and working groups to begin with. Bob, who had a long experience with ACT UP, instead proposed some kind of variation on ACT UP's "mass meeting" or "general meeting" approach, which, he wrote in an email at the time:

> worked quite well even in the late 80s when our meetings drew 500-800 people weekly. The keys to success, I think, are three-fold:
>
> 1) vigorous working groups that hash out most of the strategies, and only have to bring them to the group for broad political buy-in (or rejection or modification or additions)
>
> 2) strong facilitation of mass meetings, and
>
> 3) sticking to agreed upon time limits at meetings.
>
> And of course a spirit of trust and good will about consensus decision-making.

This was the model eventually chosen, and something similar was chosen in most of the other cities where DANs sprung up. It worked quite well for the two things DAN was best suited to do—to help organize mass mobilizations, and to disseminate a certain model of democratic process—but it ensured that NYC DAN would, over time, look less and less like a network and more and more like an organization. Nonetheless, it always combined elements of both. Membership was open. Anyone could show up at DAN general meetings, which were held every Sunday at Charas; from there, new people could be channeled to working groups that reflected their interests. While the full list of working groups varied over time, the basic list ran something like this:

NUTS & BOLTS – took care of everything required for meetings
FINANCE – kept the treasury, organized fund-raising events
COMMUNICATIONS – kept up the web page and listserv
OUTREACH – prepared pamphlets, posters, propaganda
LEGAL – consulted on various legal issues surrounding protests
CONTINENTAL DAN – a team of rotating spokes who took part in the biweekly conference calls and did the ongoing work of writing and rewriting the charter
LABOR SOLIDARITY WORKING GROUP – was made up of a core of about a dozen activists who met at ABC No Rio. DAN Labor, as it was generally called, was an effort to maintain the "Turtles and Teamsters" alliance established at Seattle by providing support for strikes and other union campaigns. There were many opportunities for this, since what unions are and are not legally allowed to do is carefully regulated. Unions are forbidden, for example, to threaten secondary boycotts or establishpicket lines against those who supply or contract with struck firms, but there's no way to prevent a completely independent group like DAN Labor from doing so. In addition, DAN provided support for strikers, for example providing puppets and street theater for rallies, parades, and picket lines. Some active members were also involved in the IWW or ISO; almost all were of working class origin.
POLICE & PRISONS WORKING GROUP – a group of roughly similar size, that worked largely to support campaigns by community organizations and activist groups around the city that were largely made up of people of color, and campaigning against police brutality and what was referred to in activist circles at least as the Prison Industrial Complex. The group itself was entirely white, and like DAN Labor, saw its role as providing resources to campaigns initiated by others—in this case, trying to use the fact that white activists were able to use direct action tactics with far less risk of arrest than their allies, owing to the very systemic racism they were campaigning against.

There were other groups that organized around particular ongoing campaigns—the World Bank Bonds group, the Genetically Modified Foods campaign, among others—but these were minor or short-lived in comparison. Finally, at any given time, there were any number of other campaigns of the moment, starting with the attempt to shut down the IMF/World Bank meetings in April 2000, NYC DAN's original raison d'etre. A16 was considered a mixed success. It wasn't a spectacular, knock-down victory like Seattle. The meetings were not shut down. But it was a huge and successful mobilization that left everyone feeling the movement was effective and growing, alliances were being built, and moreover, it succeeded in making a national issue of the role of international financial institutions that most Americans had until then not even been aware of.

Things grew trickier when CDAN decided, soon afterwards, to plan symmetrical actions in Los Angeles and Philadelphia, against the Democratic and Republican National Conventions. This involved alliance-building, and DAN soon found that its chosen allies (the Student Liberation Action Movement, based in Hunter College, and the Mumia Coalition) had very different ideas about the political focus of the actions. CDAN had originally conceived the idea of simultaneous actions against the Republican and Democratic conventions as a way of highlighting the inherently undemocratic nature of the American electoral system—of challenging, in fact, the very definition of "democracy"—its allies had more immediate concerns. In the end, after a good deal of tension and infighting, NYC DAN agreed that the Philadelphia actions would be aimed at focusing public attention on the US Prison Industrial Complex. DAN's allies also did not want to organize under the rubric of DAN, an overwhelmingly white group, so in theory the actions against the RNC in Philadelphia were carried out by a newly invented entity called the "August 1st Coalition," after the proposed day of action. The actions themselves were a mixed success, and in media terms, something of a disaster. While in Seattle and Washington, it was almost impossible to get the mainstream media to explain *why* we were protesting, the actions had the effect of making an issue out of the very existence of institutions—the WTO, IMF, World Bank—that most Americans had not even known about. In effect, it was enough to point. In Philly, even pointing didn't work. Despite the efforts of a very experienced media team, we couldn't even get the press to mention phrases like "prison industrial complex." Quite a number of activists dropped out, after Philly, over issues of racism.

Québec led to problems too—while the actions in Québec itself were a spectacular success, very few New Yorkers got to them, and Akwesasne was a disaster that left all sorts of recriminations over what had gone wrong. At this point, DAN was no longer a network, it was a group that initiated coalitions. Then came September 11, It, of course, shocked the activist community in New York itself more than anywhere: activists had to deal with the same grief and paranoia that other New Yorkers did, with the added fear that their movements were about to be systematically suppressed by a new national security state. By the time of the actions hastily thrown together against the World Economic Forum, held in the Waldorf Astoria in midtown Manhattan a few months later, there were, in fact, two different coalitions initiated largely by DAN members: one called Another World Is Possible (AWIP), which ended up organizing the march, and the Anti-Capitalist Convergence (ACC), the more radical group which planned the largely abortive direct actions. At this point, DAN, much shrunk in size, had become essentially a hub of activists who knew how to create larger coalitions, and didn't even aspire to be a network embracing every aspect of organizing in the city. It soon fell into kind of terminal crisis over its status. Was DAN a group? Was it a more limited network? Should it return to its original vision? There were some groups—CLAC, in Montréal, for example—who weathered the crisis by returning to the spokescouncil model that DAN had rejected at the very beginning. Many members of NYC DAN were pushing for something along these lines, but ultimately, their arguments did not carry the day: in part because the real core of DAN was, at that point, not in the working groups but in DAN General, which became a kind of pool of activist resources, legal, organizational, media skills, and so on. In late 2002, first Police & Prisons, then Labor, fell into crisis and dissolved themselves, and, by early the next year, DAN itself no longer formally existed: though it was, essentially, the same people who played the key roles in putting together almost all of the most radical peace coalitions, international solidarity groups, and radical protest groups in the years that followed. DAN, as a model, had indeed spread everywhere.

SECTION II: PROCESS

Consensus and Facilitation

Let me turn now to some of the ethnographic baselines: meeting dynamics, consensus, and the art of facilitation. As promised, I will begin with the first facilitation training I myself attended, in the spring of 2000. This was a DAN training: since DAN continually rotated facilitators, it was felt everyone in DAN should at least be capable of playing that role. The crew consisted of three trainers, Mac and Lesley, the two Toronto natives who had been with NYC DAN since its inception, and Jim, a fortyish activist then working with Hudson Valley DAN, along with about a dozen activist trainees. All were relatively recent DAN recruits, ranging from Chris, a seventeen-year-old punk guitarist, to Nat, a woman in her seventies, long active in Marxist groups, who had become increasingly involved in anarchist ones over the last few years. Everyone had at least some experience with consensus process, and was familiar with at least some of the theory behind it.

Facilitation Training, Charas El Bohio

Sunday, May 21, 2000

[*We start with a go-round where everyone, the three trainers and eight or nine trainees summarize their own experience with consensus, which ranges from working in food coops or cooperative bookstores to direct action training at A16 or observing spokescouncils in Seattle. You never know, Jim observed, when you might be in a situation that requires knowing how to facilitate—especially in smaller groups. There are some people who are just naturally good facilitators, but anyone can learn to do it, and, if nothing else, it's not fair to expect the same people to have to do it all the time.*]

[*Lesley explains the agenda, pointing to a sheet on butcher paper taped to the wall.*]

AGENDA

1 INTRODUCTION AND EXPERIENCE (10 min.)
2 WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T (20 min.)
3) CONSENSUS—WHAT IS IT? (20 min.)
4) FACILITATION TOOLS (30 min.)
5) ROLE PLAY (10 min.)
6) DAN AGENDA (20 min.)
7) FEEDBACK (open)

Mac: I thought maybe we should start explaining why we're organizing the training this way. We've kind of based our approach on popular education models where the idea is first you build a common analysis of how all of us see something—in this case, consensus—and then try to put that analysis into effect.

Lesley: That's the idea, anyway. We'll see if it actually works.

Mac: Then the model of how to do a workshop, we got from this book… [*he hands out photocopies*] Actually, we've never done this before, so it's kind of an experiment. If it doesn't work, we can always try something else.

WHAT WORKS? WHAT DOESN'T?

Jim: Okay, so, shall we start by asking people to talk about particularly effective forms of consensus decision-making they've observed, moments or approaches or techniques they thought worked really well, and what they liked about them? Then later we can move on to things that didn't work so well.

Neala: I really like it when you take a little time at the beginning of a meeting to get to know each other. In a lot of meetings; everyone just jumps into the matter at hand, and there's no way to set people at ease with each other, establish a sense of mutual peace, begin to develop the sense of a group mind.

Jim: So you're saying an icebreaker of some sort?

Christa: Yes, whether it's a listening exercise, where everyone pairs off and one is supposed to talk for one minute about something that's been on their mind a lot that day, and the other isn't allowed to say anything, but just has to listen—and then they switch off. Or something silly, like when everyone goes around in a circle and says what kind of animal they'd most like to be.

Sara: Or if it's people who don't know each other, just why they decided to come to the meeting.

Neala: Or what they'd like to see come out of it.

[*Lesley has a blank sheet with "works/doesn't work" at the top, and a magic marker, which she is whimsically waving in the air. She stops and writes "icebreakers."*]

Sara: I really like brainstorming sessions—what do you call it? "Popcorn." When you set aside ten minutes when everyone gets to just call out ideas, whatever comes into their heads, no matter how stupid or ridiculous, and no one is allowed to comment on or criticize them, but can only call out one of their own. It's times like that when I've felt I've really been in the presence of a group mind… well, especially when after the brainstorming session, you can actually start to patch together a proposal that brings all the best ideas together.

Mark: Restating proposals. I can't tell you how many times I've sat through a ten-, fifteen-minute argument and it turned out that the only reason people were arguing is because they didn't understand what was actually being proposed. People keep raising all sorts of concerns and objections that end up proving completely irrelevant once they're reminded of the actual wording of the thing.

Lesley: [*pen in hand, brow furrowed*] Now, that's sounding like it might actually be for the "what doesn't work" column. What do you think?

Christa: Why don't we put it on both: "losing track of the proposal" on one side, "restating" on the other. [*She does.*]

Walter: I think it's really useful when the facilitator steps in to remind everyone of their commonalities—whether it's the principles of the group, or the reasons we're trying to come to agreement on something to begin with. I've seen several times when it seemed everyone was at loggerheads over some minor point, or it was descending into some kind of stupid pissing contest, and if you have a skillful facilitator, they can step in to subtly remind everyone why they're all here in such a way the whole issue just melts away and seems stupid.

Megan: Or more generally, when the facilitator is able to make sure everyone stays in problem-solving mode rather than debate mode. (Maybe you should write that.)

George: And while we're at it: when the facilitator remembers to clarify when they're speaking *as* facilitator, and when they're giving their own opinion. I think it's really important to have some phrase like "let me call on myself here" to show they're now speaking as a member of the group, not as the person conducting the meeting.

Mac: And even that should be kept to the minimum. In DAN we always tell people that if they're going to be bringing a proposal before the group, they can't also facilitate that meeting.

Christa: Maybe that should be on the "doesn't work side" too—when facilitators offer their own opinions…

George: …or don't make it clear they are not doing so *as* facilitator.

Lesley: I'll just put it on both sides again.

Jim: So I'm thinking maybe there's no point in dealing with good process first, then bad process—maybe we should just run them both together, since that's what we're doing anyway.

[*Before long we have created a fairly substantial two-column list, with a particularly long list of potential problems—lack of time limits, people who like to hear themselves speak, biased facilitation, speculative discussions on what to do based on contingencies that never end up having any bearing on what actually happens, bad vibes, breakdown of trust—and a number of additional good process ideas, from maintaining gender parity among speakers to the importance of having someone around to greet and orient new people who don't understand the process.*]

WHAT IS CONSENSUS?

Mac: Well, that was useful—part of the reason we like to start that way is just to give us ideas about how to improve our own process in DAN.

So, next we were going to talk a little bit about consensus, what makes it different from other forms of decision-making—particularly voting and majority rule. I'm going to start by throwing out the way that's most different for me, which is that consensus as process. Voting is *just* a way of making decisions. The fact that you end things with a vote doesn't necessarily tell you anything about the process that leads up to the vote: though usually it's some kind of formal debate, *Robert's Rules of Order*. Consensus is not just a way of coming to a decision, or, really, not even primarily a way of coming to a decision. It's a process. A way for people to deal with each other which puts the emphasis on mutual respect and creativity, and which tries to make sure no one is able to impose their will on others and that all voices can be heard. As a process, it's not even necessarily the most efficient way of coming to a decision. I think—I guess most of us think, if we're involved with DAN—that it's the process that will be most likely to produce the wisest decision, but I'd actually say that even if sometimes it doesn't, it's more important to reach the decision through a truly egalitarian process than to come up with the absolute ideal course of action every time. Decisions can usually be changed later anyway. And there are times when I'd even say it might be better not to reach a decision at all.

Now, there are as many styles of consensus as there are groups. Groups like DAN use a fairly formal process—though some groups use a much more formal one—other, smaller groups are much more informal in their process.

Jim: Though you know the degree of formality doesn't only depend on the size of the group, it's also a matter of familiarity. I've seen pretty large groups who've known each other for years, and who are used to the process, who usually dispense with the formalities entirely.

Lesley: Also: we're not saying consensus is always necessarily going to be the best way to do things. Sometimes efficiency really is the most important—say, the cops are coming right at you and you have to decide what to do. Or when there are a lot of working people who just don't have the time for long meetings. Or when you're working with allies with very different traditions. A lot of people-of-color groups are very suspicious of consensus. They see it as a white granola crunchy sort of thing, and in a situation like that, it would be really arrogant to insist it's the only way to go.

Mac: And there are situations when consensus just won't work. When we were organizing homeless people in Toronto, we tried and tried. Meetings took forever, everybody stood up and made speeches, no one would respect the stack but they'd interrupt and argue with each other…

George: [*Laughs.*] Sounds like a bunch of aging Marxists.

Megan: Or, actually, most anarchists who are over forty or fifty years old.

Sara: Oh, god, I was at the Brecht Forum at a meeting of the Libertarian Book Club last week and almost everyone there were older generation anarchists. And I couldn't believe it: have these guys ever heard of process? Or even basic respect for other human beings? They were all jumping on chairs and cutting each other off, and at one point I swear two of them were literally screaming at each other.

David: Yeah, so now you know why I stayed away from anarchist politics for the first thirty-eight years of my life.

Mac: Anyway, so in Toronto, finally we just gave up and adopted a different process.

Lesley: So how shall I write down your point? "Process versus decision"?

Mac: Yeah, that's good. Anyway, sorry, I've been hogging the floor. Anyone else?

Chris: Well, I guess the idea of consensus is that it's a way of seeking commonality. You start by assuming everyone in the room probably has a somewhat different perspective, and you're not trying to change that, you're just trying to see if you can create some sort of common ground.

Neala: Also, it's supposed to be a process where everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in shaping the final decision. Unlike in majority voting, where you always end up with some alienated minority who voted against the proposal but then they just have to live with it anyway. Everyone has some input, a chance to suggest changes.

[*Lesley is scribbling away*]

Jessica: Though I think it's more than that. There have been times I've been at meetings and there's a proposal I didn't even like all that much, but over the course of the discussion, it became obvious that just about everyone else thought it was a really good idea. I found there's actually something kind of pleasurable in being able to just let go of that, realizing that what I think isn't even necessarily all that important, because I really respect these people, and trust them. It can actually feel good. But, of course, it only feels good because I know it was *my* decision, that I could have blocked the proposal if I'd really wanted to. *I* chose not to take myself too seriously.

Lesley: So how would I write that down?

Jessica: Maybe… well, "egoism." "Consensus disempowers egoism." Something like that.

Mac: Great. What else?

Nat: For me, the nice thing about consensus is that everyone has their brain turned on. I don't just go to sleep like I used to in most of the meetings I've ever been to because what I think actually can have some bearing on what's happening, at any point.

Sara: Plus you have to actually *listen* to what other people say.

David: Actually, that's one of the things I really like about consensus process. In majoritarian politics, you're always trying to make your opponent's idea look like a bad idea, so the incentive is always to make their arguments seem stupider than they really are. In consensus, you're trying to come up with a compromise, or synthesis, so the incentive is to always look for the best or smartest part of other people's arguments.

Chris: I'd write "creativity." Some of the most beautiful examples of consensus I've ever seen have been when everyone seems at loggerheads, you have two different proposals and there seems no possible way to reconcile them, it's starting to look like the group's divided 50/50 and everyone's starting to dig in their heels, and then, suddenly, someone just pops out with a completely new idea and everyone instantly is like, "oh, okay. Let's do that then."

Mac: Actually that's a really important point because it's a common misunderstanding that consensus is mainly about compromise—so then critics will say consensus process means that when you do come to a decision, it always tends to come out kind of wishy-washy. That's not true. Sometimes it's about compromise. But it's also about leaving things maximally open to collective creativity, so sometimes instead of trying to reach a compromise you can just make up a completely new proposal.

Megan: Plus, you can come to decisions as radical as the group making them…

[A*nd so on. At the end we spent a minute or two talking about the challenges and pitfalls, mainly the dangers "consensus by attrition," when a determined minority tries to wear everyone else out, but most of these had already been laid out in the "doesn't work" section.*]

HISTORY

Mac: I'll just do this briefly. Now, of course there are a lot of Native American societies who have been making decisions by consensus for thousands of years. In the United States, though, consensus process really goes back to the Quakers; it only began to be adopted by activist groups with the anti-war and anti-nuclear movement in the 1970s, which a lot of Quakers were involved with. There were sections of the civil rights movement that used consensus—SNCC did, but others, like the Southern Christian Leadership Council, didn't. SDS, and others active in the '60s anti-war movement, also used consensus to some degree.

In the 1970s, feminists *really* changed and developed the idea—a lot of feminist groups adopted consensus as a kind of antidote to some of the more obnoxious macho leadership styles of the 1960s, and that's when the kind of consensus process we're using now really came into being. From there, it was adopted in the anti-nuke campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s, and became widely adopted in the environmental movement, particularly in radical environmental groups like Earth First! It's from there it really came to DAN.

The labor movement *does not* use consensus. They use *Robert's Rules of Order*. Even though labor solidarity is a big part of DAN. That can create a cultural clash sometimes. Actually, in Police & Prisons we sometimes have the same problems because a lot of the groups we're working with are organized totally differently.

Nat: So, one thing I've always wondered is: do we do things this way because we think it's the most effective, or is the idea that this is the way things will work in the future, that we're starting to create our dreams now.

Jim: Well, ideally, it should be a little of both.

Sara: But you say labor hasn't really embraced consensus. So, have there been any attempts to apply these ideas to organizing workplaces, or anything, I guess, other than planning actions or little co-ops and the like?

Jim: It's certainly not unknown. The IWW have definitely done some experiments with collectivization, worker-run enterprises that… I'm pretty sure they operated by some kind of consensus process. And actually there are a fair number of nonprofits or even capitalist firms that use some version of consensus in their day-to-day operation. I've seen a list somewhere: it's actually surprisingly long. Everything from the US Forestry Service to Saturn and Harley-Davidson and, of course, almost any large corporation in, say, Japan, operates by some kind of consensus. But examples like that also make it clear there's consensus and there's consensus; you do even very egalitarian-seeming process within what's still a totally hierarchical, top-down organization and the process itself become a form of coercion or oppression, a way of constantly forcing you to pretend to agree with decisions in which you really had no say.

TERMINOLOGY

The basic terms, according to the new sheet on the wall, are:

PROPOSALS
FRIENDLY AMMENDMENTS
STAND-ASIDES and BLOCKS
MODIFIED CONSENSUS

Lesley: So, I'll assume we're all familiar with the basic structure of a DAN meeting. We generally have two facilitators, one male, one female, and they usually take turns, with, at any time, one of them actually leading discussion, and the other managing the **stack** of speakers. Keeping stack is actually an important skill, because you don't want to leave people standing there with their hands up for ten minutes until they get called on. You want to be able to catch their eye, nod, or send some kind of little signal that they're on the stack, and then keep track of the order, even if you don't necessarily know who they are—so you might have to call on "the woman with the green shirt," or "the man in red in the front." In which case it's important to be consistent. I always use shirt color if I can't remember the name. Obviously you're not going to be calling on "the fat chick in the front," or "the guy with the gigantic nose ring," but you'd be amazed how almost anything you single out about someone might have a subtle effect of making them feel alienated or… well, singled out. So keep it uniform.

So anyway: **proposals**. A proposal is a suggestion as to a course of action that someone's putting before the group. Proposals can be presented by an individual or by a group—in DAN, the usual idea is that important proposals are brought to DAN General by representatives of one of the working groups. But it doesn't have to be, anyone can actually propose something.

Sara: Does a proposal have to be written down?

Lesley: No. We ask working groups to bring theirs in writing, but half the time they don't remember, and individuals' proposals are almost never written out.

Someone: Does a proposal *have* to refer to a course of action?

Lesley: Actually, that's a good question. Does it? Well, I guess it depends on how you define the term. For example, when you first put a group together, you have to come to consensus around your principles of unity. Or you can consense on, say, endorsing someone else's action, or on the text of some outreach literature. But, generally speaking, it's something you want to *do*. The one thing you definitely don't use consensus for is for questions of definition: like should US intervention in Somalia be considered an example of imperialism or something like that. You're not trying to define reality. You're trying to decide what to do.

David: So you'll never get in a situation like in the ISO—or, I think it was their British branch, the SWP—where I heard that all the anthropologists were purged recently because they didn't agree with the party line that humans had only really become human in the Neolithic. (I don't know if this is really true.)

Mac: Yeah, the whole idea is to make sure that kind of crazy shit never happens. Insofar as we even talk about such questions—like "are we an anticapitalist organization?", "are we opposed to all forms of hierarchy?"—it's going to be in the mission statement, or principles of unity. And those are important because they're the basis on which you block. But, we also try to keep those limited to points which will have some bearing on action.

Lesley: So, generally speaking, a proposal is a suggestion for action put before a group. As facilitator, the first thing you do when someone has made a proposal is ask for **clarifying questions**: to make sure everyone is clear on exactly what's being proposed. Then you ask if anyone has any **concerns**: problems such a course of action might cause, reasons why it might not be the best course of action to take. (As facilitator, you'll find it's sometimes a little tricky distinguishing clarifying questions from concerns.) Sometimes, at this point, it becomes obvious there's a strong feeling against the proposal, and the person who presented it might just decide to withdraw it. Alternately, people might propose one or more **friendly amendments**, to address the concerns, which—if the person making the proposal accepts them—then become part of the proposal.

Jim: It's good to have a scribe for this—someone writing everything down for when you have to restate the proposal in its current form.

Lesley: Or someone might decide instead to put out an alternative proposal. Or you might end up with a whole bunch of them. Though it tends to get *real* messy if you get past two or three.

Mac: There are techniques for getting rid of annoying proposals that no one really likes. For instance, in Police & Prisons, we'll sometimes say "maybe we should form a working group to discuss that," and pass around a sign-up sheet for the working group. And then, of course, no one signs up.

Lesley: But this is the *main* role of the facilitator: to walk the group through, clarify what the proposals are, what problems or issues folks might have with them, whether anything needs to be added, or modified. It can get really tricky if there's more than one proposal on the table. There are a series of tools you can use in that case. You can have a verbal go-round, and ask everyone to weigh in on the question. Or you can try a non-binding straw poll: a show of hands. That's not the same as a vote, because it's not actually a way of coming to a decision, but it can give you a sense of the room and, often, if you discover one proposal has very strong support and the second, almost none, that's really all you need to know. Or you can go over each in turn "does anyone still have serious concerns with proposal #1?"

Jim: Bear in mind here that proposals are not *necessarily* mutually exclusive.

Lesley: Yes, the one thing you always want to encourage people to do is to break down dichotomies, point out the ways people are all saying the same thing. Even in very practical things, it's the job of the facilitator to try to define the common ground: "So I'm hearing a very strong feeling that we shouldn't do anything that's very militant until Tuesday, and also a lot of concerns that we not endanger the surrounding community. Now, is there anyone who feels we shouldn't do a militant action at all, even on Tuesday?"...

Jim: Or it can go the other way. If you keep restating the proposals, you can sometimes discover that people are actually interpreting words differently, and there really are very different ideas as to what's going on.

Lesley: Finally, hopefully, you've boiled things down to one proposal and you're up to the point of actually trying to find consensus. At that point, you ask if there are any **stand-asides**, or any **blocks**. Now, in the case of a stand-aside, there's actually different interpretations of what that means. One is that you're in effect saying "I won't participate in this action myself, but I have no problem with the rest of the group doing it." Another is that you're against the idea, but you don't feel it's so serious a problem you'd actually leave the group over the issue. It's a way to register a minor objection, and it's important that after you do come to consensus, you give everyone who stood aside a chance to explain why they objected, and to have them registered in the meeting notes if they want them to be.

If there are a lot of stand-asides, say, five or six in a group of twenty, then that's a serious problem. It means the process broke down at some point, because those people should have had the chance to voice their objections before it came to that.

As for **blocks**, it's a really nice thing to know that you *can* block a proposal, that if you feel that strongly about something you could stop a proposal dead in its tracks, but it's basically a safeguard. If you do it, things can get ugly. Because you're basically saying, "this violates the fundamental principles of the organization and I can't allow it."

Mac: Of course it's also totally critical because without the power to block, it's not consensus. That's why we've tried to get some kind of mechanism for blocking into Continental DAN, even though it's hard to figure out how you'd do it in a large federative structure.

Lesley: It's not to be done lightly. Usually, if you block, you run the danger of isolating yourself, people will often be tempted to badger a blocker—so it's important to bear that in mind as facilitator and make sure the person is being respected.

Jim: One person I once saw—this was like a facilitator's worst nightmare—it was at an anarchist convention, and there was this one guy who just blocked everything because he was against consensus on principle. I'm never quite sure what, had I been facilitator, I would be able to do about that. [*He looks to Mac.*]

Mac: Well, a block is supposed to be based in the founding principles or reasons for being of the group, so I'd say you could challenge it on that basis. If the group is based on consensus, it's hard to see how blocking because you don't like consensus could be consistent with that. That would be the very definition of an unprincipled block.

Jim: Yes, but then, isn't it also a basic principle of consensus decision-making that you can't challenge another activists' motives? You have to give them the benefit of the doubt for integrity and good intentions. So how do you challenge them on that?

Mac: Well, when you say "unprincipled block," I think that means *not* rooted in the group's principles of unity. You're not saying that the person is personally unprincipled. Sounds like you're dealing with a person who's being totally honest and principled about his motives, they're just not the principles of the group. Which kind of raises the question of why he came to their meeting in the first place. I'd tell him: why not join a group whose principles he likes, or if that doesn't exist, try to start a new one?

Christa: But I thought the idea of a block is that you're saying "this is an issue so important to me I'd be willing to quit the group over it"? Not necessarily a matter of founding principles.

Mac: Well, it doesn't have to be, though it's true some interpret it that way.

Chris: At A16, in my affinity group, we had a proposal to build a roadblock out of materials from a nearby construction site, and someone blocked it because they thought we didn't have the right to carry off stuff that didn't belong to us and that didn't have anything to do with the IMF or World Bank. But our affinity group didn't actually have any formal principles of unity. So how would that be justified?

Lesley: Well, usually the idea is, either you're saying a proposal violates your founding principles, or that it violates the basic reasons for being or purposes of the group. So there's wiggle room. But generally speaking, you don't want to be super-legalistic about this kind of thing. Or maybe it's better to say, if people start getting super-legalistic, then that's usually a sign you have a real problem in the group.

Megan: At one point, at A16, we were outside the jail—there were about sixty of us outside doing jail solidarity. We had expected that our lawyers would be allowed in to see the arrestees, but the cops turned them all away. Some of us wanted to put on a really loud and defiant protest. There was a crew with puppets and drums who were really into the idea of having a big parade around the jail. But someone pointed out that it wasn't just activists who were being held in there, that there were families of other inmates who also wanted to get in. We'd formed a circle and were trying to decide what to do. If we raised a ruckus, let alone tried a lockdown, then all those others wouldn't be able to get inside. Someone blocked against anything that would make so much noise it would make problems for other visitors. So some of the puppet folks announced, "We have no consensus, here, so we're going to start a new affinity group for people who still want to have a parade."

Mac: Well, yeah, you can have some, um, creative solutions to that sort of impasse.

Christa: So did they have the parade?

Megan: Actually, I'm not sure what happened. It was around then that I left. I think they had a parade, but it was much more low-key than they'd originally intended. What's more, I think a lot of the problem was that the blocker was a newcomer, most people didn't know her, which complicated things.

Lesley: Actually, that's another thing facilitators have to figure out ways to deal with—because if there's a new person, if you don't, often they won't be taken as seriously.

Sara: Can it ever come down to openly questioning the motivations of the blocker? Like, you don't actually *know* if that woman wasn't a cop.

Mac: Well, I suppose in that case you could, but I would be *really* careful about publicly suggesting someone might be a cop.

Lesley: Actually, I'd say no. You can't question a person's motivations. That's a matter of basic principle. But you can question their reasoning. Or, as facilitator, you can try to reframe things, ask the person, "Well, what would you need in order to feel comfortable with the proposal?" That's if you're pretty sure someone is prepared to block. And, if they actually do block, then sometimes it's a good idea to suggest that the blocker join the working group that originally brought the proposal, or, anyway, work with whoever it was to see if they can't come up with some kind of alternative they'd be willing to live with.

Which actually leads to another concept, **modified consensus**. DAN itself hasn't actually decided if it has an option to fall back on this, but…

Neala: Wait a minute: I thought it had.

Mac: Well, yeah, technically, I think it's in our principles, but we've never actually defined what that would mean in practice.

Lesley: Modified consensus would be, for example, if you have just one or two blocks, but others felt it was absolutely critical to force the issue, you might have an option to go to a weighted vote: say, two-thirds majority, or seventy or eighty percent Sometimes, you won't even be able get that kind of majority, because the fact that one person felt strongly enough to block will be enough to convince a lot of other people to change their minds and vote against the proposal. Anyway, there are other forms of modified consensus: for example, consensus minus one, where if someone blocks, you go around to see if there's at least one other member of the group who feels their argument is compelling enough that they'd back it up. Some groups use consensus minus two or three, and so on. Anyway, the critical thing here is this is a last resort; you only fall back on it if you've done everything possible to get consensus and you just can't. I've been involved in a lot of groups with a modified consensus option, but not one where we actually had to use it—which I'm very happy to be able to say, because the whole idea makes me really uncomfortable. No one has ever been able to explain to me how the whole idea really squares with the principle of consensus.

Jim: The groups that really tend to use modified consensus the most are very large groups, like spokescouncils, where people don't really know each other, and sometimes you just don't have time to allow any one person to hijack the process.

George: Wasn't there supposed to be a case of one DAN chapter on the West Coast where some ISO people wanted to show how consensus couldn't really work, so they just blocked everything? Sort of like Jim was talking about at the anarchist convention.

Jim: Oh. I hadn't heard about that.

Mac: [*sighs*] Yeah, that was San Francisco DAN. It almost destroyed the group. There were only three ISOers, but they tried to systematically sabotage the process to force people to go over to majority vote.

David: What did they end up doing?

Mac: Well, one day, there was a meeting where the ISO people didn't show up, so everyone immediately put through a proposal that the group would operate on consensus minus three.

TOOLS AND RULES

Jim: So we thought we'd end with some tools and resources for facilitators, which you may or may not want to use. The first of these is a **timekeeper**. That's important because, in making the agenda, you definitely want to have people agree on how much time you want to allocate to each item, but there's no point in doing that unless someone's paying attention and is able to tell everyone that time for discussion is over and someone will have to propose an extension if we're going to go on. I like to keep my own time, but some use a timekeeper, or have the co-facilitator do it.

Then there's the **scribe**, which I think is really important. Especially if it's before a big action and there's huge amounts of information to keep track of, and you can't assume that everyone in the room is taking notes. In the past, I often forgot to make sure there was a minute-taker, and sometimes it really came back to haunt me because people would have different memories about what we actually decided. In big formal DAN meetings, you want to make sure at the very least there's someone writing down all the proposals, precisely what's been consensed on, with all the friendly amendments and so on. It's also useful to keep a permanent record of important decisions in some place that's publicly available, like a web page, because that becomes like the institutional memory of the group. If you don't, it can become the basis for a tacit power structure, because some people have immediate access to that information just because they've been around for a long time, or keep track of it—they can suddenly interrupt a discussion and say, "but wait a minute! we already decided that a year ago"—and other people just don't know. One of the key things you'll find in an egalitarian group is that access to information becomes the main basis for emerging power structures, so you have to do everything possible to try to nip that sort of thing in the bud.

What else?

Water. Having a small bottle of water next to you in a meeting is really helpful. That's not just for facilitators—everyone should have access to water. If you find your throat is so dry you're constantly reaching for the water, then that's a good sign you're talking too much and should shut up.

Lesley: **Food**, too. It's not a bad idea to have some kind of food in the back of the room, especially if the meeting is likely to go on for hours. And you should pay attention to make sure there aren't other factors that might be keeping some people from attending your meetings: lack of childcare, for example, or translators.

Mac: We've already talked about **straw polls**. If you have various proposals on the floor, it's a useful technique to gauge people's feelings. Also, if it's something which couldn't possibly turn on a matter of principle, like, should we have the next meeting on Tuesday or on Wednesday, sometimes a straw poll is all you need. Um, what else?

Jessica: What about **hand signals**? At the coop I was part of in Oberlin, we had a whole series of hand signals: the facilitator could ask for people's feelings towards a proposal and you could either give a thumbs up, thumbs down, or thumbs sideways if you were undecided.

Mac: Everybody uses different ones. In DAN of course we twinkle, you know, waving your fingers in the air to express strong support or approval for a proposal or someone else's point—though a few people find the whole idea of "twinkling" kind of a flaky California thing.

Jessica: At Oberlin we'd do "knocking," you make a fist and gesture like this.

Mac: There's a million of them. Some people use little devil fingers—you know, like you'd put behind someone's head in a photograph if you're six years old and think that sort of thing is really clever?

Lesley: But there's a few standard ones that are kind of useful. A lot of groups use a gesture for "direct response": if someone makes a point and you have factual information that bears directly on it, but very directly, like, "no, they cancelled that event," or one speaker is actually asking you a question and you want to reply. You have to be very careful with that one. Because you really don't want things to descend into cross-talk, which means then you can end up with some kind of ego contest between two people and everyone else is annoyed and shut out. It's usually better to keep to the stack, and let the conversation end up being a little frustratingly circuitous, than giving people an excuse to be all self-important and dominate the conversation. There's also the little triangle you make with your fingertips that means "point of process"—that's another way to cut into the stack, but that's just for comments you're making directly to the facilitator, for example, "aren't we supposed to still be discussing the other proposal?" or "didn't we already decide this last week?"

Christa: I have a question about **go-rounds**. Do you find them effective? And when do you use them?

Lesley: You have to be careful with go-rounds. It's a nice way to encourage people who might be too shy or unsure of themselves to speak to offer an opinion, but they take a lot of time. You definitely have to set time limits. Even if you allow, say, one minute per speaker, if there's sixty people in the room, that's an hour right there. So they're best with small groups. On the other hand, if it is a small group, and it's very important, you can even try two go-arounds, to see if people's ideas evolve when they hear what other people have to say. If it's a big group it's better to fall back on the old "let's just hear from people who haven't spoken so far" trick. That last one is useful because, say, if white men are completely dominating the conversation and none of the women or people of color are talking, you can point that out, it sounds a bit patronizing to say "let's hear from some women for a change." Or, "let's hear from some African-Americans." But asking for people who haven't already spoken can have pretty much the same effect.

George: What about the whole "hearing" thing?

Lesley: Huh?

George: You know, when the facilitator says, "I'm hearing a lot energy around the idea of such and such."

Lesley: Well, usually that's a way of trying to catch the sense of the room, to suggest there's some sort of emerging consensus on the part of the group, at least around certain aspects of a proposal. Of course, it's only a suggestion. In part, it's a way of testing, because sometimes, if you say, oh, I don't know, "I'm hearing a lot of support for the idea of a parade of some sort" then someone will immediately say "No, actually, I don't think there should be any kind of parade at all."

Jim: We're kind of running out of time here so let me just throw out a couple other techniques very quickly. Some of these are things which, well, on the West Coast they often have a vibes-watcher, whose job is to keep track of the emotional quality of the room. If people are getting bored, or tense, or angry, or someone is feeling alienated or excluded, or, for that matter, if it's too hot or there's not enough light, they step in and intervene. Here, it's usually the facilitator who has to keep track of these things, which can make things really difficult because you're juggling so many other responsibilities at the same time. The most important thing, though, is to be able to intervene if things are starting to get too tense and confrontational. Often, if you just call a time-out, let people stand up, stretch, let folks go out and smoke a cigarette or get water if they want to, when they come back, the entire mood is usually different and what seemed like major problems beforehand just look silly or unimportant. Some facilitators even suggest yoga, or breathing exercises.

Lesley: Or one big favorite is group back rubs.

Mac: And then there's the whole idea of the **reconciliation committee**. If there's a block, sometimes, you might call a time-out and use the occasion

> to talk to the principals, the person making the proposal and the person who blocked, and maybe one or two other people you know they both trust, and see if you can't get them to step out of the room together to talk the whole thing through and then come back to the meeting with a new proposal.
>
> Neala: You know, I wouldn't object to a little stretching break right now.

Which we did. This was followed by a role-play, where we used what I later learned is the classic, no-frills role-play for consensus trainings where you don't have that much time: twelve people ordering a pizza. If you have time, you can add all sorts of complications: various participants are secretly handed scraps of paper informing them they are passionately fond of anchovies, they're vegans, and so on. The task is to see if the person named facilitator can overcome these difficulties in a fairly short period of time—in this case, two minutes, which was slightly ridiculous.

In the trainings I've attended since—most of which I played some part in helping to organize, though I was never the main organizer—the role-plays took up more and more time and became more and more elaborate. In one, eight people with different political views—doctrinaire Marxists, militant anarchists, reformist environmentalists—but only one banner, were to come up with a slogan to write on it (I think we ended up with "Burn Banks, Not Trees"); later, we had an exercise in which we were trying to march into a besieged church in Bethlehem and were told to disperse by heavily armed Israeli soldiers, a situation one of the organizers had recently experienced (the most effective approach, we discovered, was to send one small group to negotiate while the rest tried to slip through another way). The most interesting, perhaps, was at a different training, where twenty activists took on the role of IMC journalists in the middle of a major action. One of them had just come in with a videotape she'd shot of the chief of police murdering an activist in cold blood; there was only one copy; the building was surrounded and the police beginning to move in. That one was meant to illustrate the limits of consensus.

Jim took some time to explain the importance of keeping one's cool as facilitator; to get oneself calm and centered beforehand. "I always take a half hour beforehand when I don't think about anything, just relax. A walk on the beach or in the park would be ideal if that's possible." Then we moved into how a DAN meeting was actually structured, with the help of a recently completed structure sheet, in indelible ink, with laminated sheets on top so that facilitators could write the particulars on top of it in magic marker and wipe it away for the next meeting.

Mac explained that at the last DAN meeting, we finally consensed on a basic skeleton structure for meetings, which runs something like this:

I) **ORIENTATION** (This usually lasts ten to fifteen minutes, as people file in late. This is where we do icebreakers, usually a listening exercise, talk about the goals of the meeting,)

II) **INTRODUCTIONS** (Everyone goes around in a circle and says who they are, what other projects or working groups they might be active in)

III) **AGENDA REVIEW AND AMENDMENTS** (Where people can add items to the agenda)

IV) **EMERGENCY EVENT ANNOUNCEMENTS** (No more than ten minutes)

V) **WORKING GROUP REPORT-BACKS** (Ten minutes; this is where you pass around sign-up sheets for your working group, or for projects or events)

VI) **ONGOING BUSINESS**

A) Proposals brought forward from internal working groups (Ten minutes each)

B) New Business (Sixty minutes max total)

C) Group Education (We've never actually done this yet, but if we have something like a video to show, an outside speaker)

VII) **DISCUSSION NEXT MEETING** (Name the new facilitator, etc.)

VIII) **FINAL ANNOUNCEMENTS**

After some minor discussion (remember to get people with announcements to specify how much time they're going to take; if working group report-backs start to turn into long discussions, cut it off and shove it all into New Business, etc):

> *Jim*: Being a facilitator can be extremely trying, and frustrating. It may seem like you're trying to drag people along against their will. But you always have to remember, it's not an adversarial relation. If you're the facilitator, the group is your ally. They *want* you to succeed.
>
> *Lesley*: It's better if you let the group itself set the agenda and, especially, decide how much time to allocate for different items. The more you do so, the more they won't mind when if you say "Okay, time is up."
>
> Different groups demand different styles of facilitation. If people are too passive, mellow, and agreeable, then you have to become more of a leader. Otherwise, everyone might end up passively assenting to decisions they'll all complain about later, and start feeling like someone put something over on them. So, in cases like that, you have to make sure half the people in the room aren't secretly swallowing their objections. Try to coax them out. Also, for larger groups, you often need a more hands-on, take-charge approach—a stronger style of facilitation.

You'll often hear, in fact, certain activists referred to as "strong facilitators" in that sense; ones capable of aggressive intervention, especially in large groups. It's considered an essentially admirable quality. In my experience, interestingly, strong facilitators are almost invariably women. In part, this is probably because men who behave this way very quickly tend to get on someone's nerves. But it is also common wisdom that most of the best facilitators are women.

CONSENSUS DEFINED BY ITS OPPOSITES

I: American Democracy

As I noted in Chapter 5, consensus decision-making was long identified with pacifism. Groups that put a strong emphasis on nonviolence still often lay a special claim on it, seeing it as the only form of decision making fully consistent with pacifist ideals. This is for much the same reasons so many anarchists do: if one refuses to use physical force to compel others to accept a group decision, then everyone must, at least on some level, consent.[10]

This is why Lesley found modified consensus a bit of a problem. If the whole idea of consensus is that no one's opinion is ever disregarded, that no one is ever going to be told "Sorry, you might hate this idea, but we had a vote and you lost so now we don't care what you think," then it doesn't matter if you fall back on a seventy or eighty or even ninety-five percent majority. Some people are still going to be told to shut up and do what they're told. Those who believe that modified consensus is, sometimes, necessary—and I would say that by now, these are the overwhelming majority of anarchists—usually point out that, as Mac emphasized, consensus, unlike voting, is not just a way of making decisions. It's a process. Coming to a decision is just the final step. If one respects the process, the "spirit of consensus" as some like to say, the exact form of that final step is not all-important. Anyway, it's not like the minority is really being compelled. No one is ever forced to take part in an action, and facilitators will often remind everyone to be careful not to do anything that might seem like applying moral pressure in such cases. Even if it's a decision bearing on the structure of the group, there's no one forcing them to stay.

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[10] I'm not sure there's a single recorded example of a stateless society that made decisions through some sort of majority voting system. Small-scale, autonomous communities almost invariably employ some variation on a consensus system. The reasons for this are fairly obvious; I've written about them at some length elsewhere (Graeber 2004). When Mao tried to replace consensus with a majority vote system in local village assemblies in rural China, for example, elders almost immediately objected on the grounds that, if proposals had to be voted up and down, then there would be winners and losers, and certain people would be publicly humiliated and lose face. In general, in local groups, it is much easier to gauge what the majority wants to do than to figure out how to convince the minority who disagree to go along with them, and holding a public contest in which that minority is seen to lose is probably the worst way one could go about it.

During my first year in DAN, I spent a lot of time trying to understand what this "spirit of consensus" was really all about. It was clearly not just about decision making. It wasn't even just about conduct during meetings. It was more an attempt—inspired by reflections on the structure and flow of meetings—to begin to reimagine how people can live together, to begin—however slowly, however painfully—to construct a genuinely democratic way of life. The perennial example of ordering a pizza (I can't tell you how many times I've seen that one used in trainings) could be seen, in its own way, as an accusation directed at the very heart of America's claims to be a democratic society. How often does the average American actually sit down, even with a group of four or five people, and try to make a collective decision in which all have equal say? True, children often do it while playing. But, for adults, the experience of democracy is largely limited to decisions involving food, or maybe movies. For the college-aged, it probably does, indeed, happen most often when ordering a pizza; for older people, mainly when choosing restaurants.

Popular conceptions of democracy in the contemporary United States[11] could be said to revolve around two concepts: "choice," and "opinion." Both are words that, significantly, are almost never used in consensus decision-making.

Democracy, one constantly hears, means that people get to make choices. They choose between different parties or candidates. They might even choose to vote yes or no on a referendum. Almost always, though, they themselves have played little or no part in shaping the things between which this choice is made. It's this ideology of choice, of course, which makes it possible to see democracy and the market as equivalents: consumer choice, as well, means selecting from a range of options designed by someone else.

It seems to me that the conception of "opinion"—personal opinions, public opinion—also follows from the absence of any real experience of participatory decision-making. In American schools, children are always being asked to express their opinions. It's a heritage of the Deweyan tradition, a quite self-conscious attempt to imbue children with a democratic spirit. The problem is that these opinions generally have no effect. Schoolchildren may be asked to decide, and express, what they think about everything from US foreign policy to the organization of gym class, but they are also perfectly well aware that these opinions have no influence on those actually making decisions, even within the school. This continues throughout life. This is, I think, what tends to give so many "personal opinions" one hears voiced in America their oddly free-floating quality, their frequent tone of arbitrariness, self-enclosure, intolerance—the very qualities that make many assume that participatory democracy would not really be possible. The phrase

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[11] "Popular" here meaning, essentially, "those given some legitimation by the corporate media."

"everyone's entitled to their opinion" is generally used as a brush-off. They are entitled to their opinion because opinions don't matter. Those in power do not have opinions. They make policy.

Understanding this might also help explain some gaping holes in political theory. As Bernard Manin (1994) has pointed out, theorists from Rousseau to Rawls always assume that citizens start with a set of pre-existing interests (usually presumed to be basically material) and then see political deliberation—what an anarchist would call "process"—as the way they compete, compromise, maneuver, and generally try to get as much as possible of what they already know they want. The notion of "opinion" fits perfectly with this logic. Opinions are also assumed to be pre-formed. At best, they can be manipulated or influenced. They can only be seen that way if no deliberation is really going on, apart perhaps from conversations in bars or over dinner. If one observes how processes of deliberation actually work, it's completely impossible to see the actors as simply bringing pre-existing "opinions" or "interests" into some political marketplace. In the process of deliberation—any political deliberation, really, though consensus process is designed to maximize this—everyone is changing their minds constantly, learning new information, identifying with different perspectives, reframing issues, measuring and weighing considerations in different ways. ("Well, at the risk of contradicting myself, let me try a different approach," Alexis announced during one debate within Ya Basta! "Why not?" replied Moose, "Hell, I've already contradicted myself at least three times just in this one meeting.")

The gulf that separates common American conceptions of democracy and anarchist practice is so great that some anarchists reject the term "democracy" entirely, preferring to limit it to representative government and majority rule. Democracy, they argue, is a form of government. They want create something else: anarchy. Primitivists and hardcore anti-organizational types are particularly likely to make this move, and they are, significantly, those most likely to reject experiments like DAN as themselves oppressive—though, among small-A's at least, they seem very much the minority. Most anarchists committed to creating broader alliances recognize that, in the words of the CrimethInc collective (2003) "most people hate the government and love democracy. Anarchy: that's just democracy without the government."

CONSENSUS DEFINED BY ITS OPPOSITES

II: Three Points of Contrast

One thing that struck me quite forcefully during my first months with the Direct Action Network was how similar its decision-making process was to the way that group decisions were made in rural communities in Madagascar, where I had done my first anthropological fieldwork between 1989 and 1991. The main difference was that DAN's process was so much more formalized and self-conscious. In the Malagasy language, there was no term for "consensus process"; this was just how decisions were made, and always had been. Insofar as it could be spoken of at all, it was as the "Malagasy" approach to decision making, contrasted, in this respect, with those typical of institutions considered essentially foreign, like schools, foreign businesses, or government offices.

Such ideals, though, are always to a certain degree defined by contrast. The need to do so is, if anything, all the more acute when one is creating something new, in self-conscious opposition to prevailing social norms. For most involved in DAN, I found, consensus came to mean *not* acting like one does at work, *not* acting like a member of a sectarian Marxist group, and *not* engaging in the sort of debate that dominates the Internet.

Let me illustrate:

1) The World of Work

This one is fairly self-evident. Any activist who has any experience with work in the corporate sector—and this is the overwhelming majority—is likely to be able to expand at length on the profound difference between the styles of human interaction typical of work environments and activist projects. Those new to the scene tend to talk constantly about newfound feelings of liberation, solidarity, freedom, trust, and so on. I have heard some talk about physical symptoms that suddenly vanished—asthma, chronic headaches, and the like—or of overnight recovery from chronic depression.

The contrast with the world of work is unsurprising. Work is, after all, both where most adult Americans spend the majority of their waking hours, and where they have their most regular experience of hierarchical organization—in particular, where they have to deal with those with the power to issue them commands. Otherwise, adult Americans largely deal with orders, or those who can treat them with impunity when interacting with bureaucrats or the police, figures they ordinarily avoid dealing with whenever possible. While, for most, one's job does involve a great deal of cooperation and mutual support as well, particularly with those of equal status, the arbitrariness of bosses is, for most anarchists, the most immediate figure for everything anarchist decision-making should not be.

In DAN, accusations of high-handed authoritarian behavior, I found, tended to most frequently occur when activists got involved in roles too similar to those they were used to doing in the corporate world. This was a trap because it was hard to avoid. If one has a great deal of experience in, say, public relations techniques, or video editing, contributing one's knowledge to the movement does seem like the obvious thing to do. But it often proves extremely difficult for those used to using such skills in the corporate world to fully break from the habit of treating those with less experience as subordinates. I have known a few who self-consciously avoid getting involved in work too similar to what they do in the formal sector for that very reason.

2) Sectarian Groups

The amount of time anarchists spend complaining about sectarian Marxist groups is quite striking; this is all the more so for anarchists involved with groups like DAN that frequently work in large coalitions and, whose contact with Marxists goes beyond merely interacting at rallies, parties, or sharing the occasional jail cell. They have to work with members of such groups on an ongoing basis. What's more, any large anarchist group is likely to include at least one or two people who had themselves been involved in one or another sectarian Marxist groups, only to have quit or been expelled. This tends to ensure both a level of deep personal feelings, and fairly accurate knowledge of how such groups actually work. "I was in for two years," said Marina, speaking of the ISO. "No, the cult-language is intentional. That's the way we talk about it. It's really like that."

Of course members of groups like the International Socialist Organization (ISO), Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), Worker's World Party (WWP), or even the Sparticist Youth League do not refer to themselves as "sectarians"—much less members of any of their front organizations. When I call them "sectarian," I am simply adopting the anarchist point of view. Anarchists tend to use the term very broadly, basically, for any political organization that has an intellectual leader and a party line. Let me then summarize the stereotype without offering any claims one way or the other about its accuracy:

> Sectarian groups are invariably organized as political parties, even if they only consist of fifteen people and have never considered running a candidate for any public office. They are organized hierarchically, with a charismatic leader (invariably male) who is also the group's Master Theorist. This leader is considered the founder of his own school of Marxist theory—since, in principle, the group sees itself as emerging from a certain theoretical understanding of the world, rather than the theoretical understanding emerging from the group. (Maoist groups for example distinguish themselves from Trotskyite groups primarily because they accept that peasants, and not just proletarians, are a potentially revolutionary class. This is true even in countries in which peasants do not exist.) The group's central committee employs this analysis to provide a comprehensive analysis of the world situation, staking out positions on major political issues of the day, and, often questions some might consider only tenuously related to politics. Purportedly, for instance, the RCP takes the position that while same-sex relations between women may be considered a legitimate

> form of resistance to patriarchy, same-sex relations between men are a bourgeois deviation. While it is not strictly forbidden for gay men to join the party, those who disagree with this position publicly, I was told, are at first pressured and ultimately purged.
>
> The party also takes positions on virtually all outstanding political conflicts in the world, (e.g., Do we support autonomy or independence for the Basque region of Spain? What is our position on the Kyoto Accords?), much like a government-in-waiting, and weighs in on past events like the Soviet invasion of Hungary, or whether the Chinese government was right to suppress the democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square. These positions tend to be aired primarily through the party's newspaper. It is the solemn duty of each party member to sell as many copies of these newspapers as possible—for both fundraising and propaganda purposes. A party member's dedication and loyalty is often measured by how many papers, in a given month, they manage to unload. For an anarchist, the easiest way to identify a sectarian at a demo is to look for the pile of newspapers under his arm. Finally, while sectarian groups regularly throw their support behind, and work very hard for, campaigns organized by others, or themselves initiate much wider coalitions, they always do so either with an eye towards taking control of that coalition, or at the very least, using it to further their own strategic agenda, however conceived.

Several features here jump out. First: these groups always conceive themselves as intellectual projects. They emerge from a certain definition of reality. This is why dissenters are so difficult to tolerate, why a major theoretical disagreement, if not patched up, inevitably leads to a split and the creation of a new group. It also explains the emphasis on propaganda: the way coalitions are seen largely as ways to disseminate ideas, the importance of the newspaper. The aim is ultimately to bring the masses to a certain level of consciousness; once they do, it will be possible to make the revolution. Finally, framing the group as an intellectual project can justify hierarchical internal structures that would be very difficult to justify otherwise: if the Leader really is the one person capable of generating a correct theoretical analysis of the world situation, his authority can hardly be put in question.

In most important ways, consensus-based groups are a perfect inversion of all this. They start by assuming that a diversity of perspectives is a value in itself, that no could really convert another completely to their point of view, and it's probably a bad idea to try. Debate turns not on questions of definition but on immediate questions of action in the present, and the emphasis on maintaining egalitarian structures follows directly from that. You can see the difference most clearly, perhaps, when it comes time to develop mission statements or principles of unity. Immediately after September 11, 2001, for instance, activists in New York gathered to discuss what to do. One group, dominated by Marxists and older 1960s veterans, began meeting at the Brecht Forum; another, younger, more broadly anarchist, crowd began meeting in Charas. Both immediately fell into contentious debate about their principles of unity. The Brecht Forum group immediately began debating its positions on what the US should and shouldn't do in Afghanistan, questions of international legality, the role of the UN, but also about whether their group should define itself as "anti-imperialist." In the second, such matters never came up. Instead, it almost instantly became mired in debates about its own democratic process and mechanisms for combating internal racism.

It's not that sectarian groups are not obsessed with action. They are. But their approach is entirely different. They tend to start from a strategic vision, and then think in terms of the most efficient means to accomplish it. The result is (again, I am speaking from the anarchist perspective) a kind of relentless, soulless utilitarianism, a world of rational means-ends calculations. It can often lead to the near complete sacrifice of personal self-realization or community-building for a kind of military-style discipline that often seems indistinguishable from the capitalist rationality it claims to oppose. The image of the clean-cut ISO kid in his button-down shirt showing up at someone else's rally to sell newspapers, became, for many in DAN, the perfect embodiment of this spirit. How did it happen that one of the key measures of loyalty to an anti-capitalist organization should be zeal at engaging in aggressive marketing techniques? In contrast, anarchists tend to insist that revolutionary action should also be a form of self-expression, and that it should be based on an ethics radically different from what prevails under capitalism.

Finally, there is the question of party discipline, and what might be termed the resultant ethics of the self. Many anarchists will point out that you can never know what any individual member of a sectarian group actually thinks. Sure, a party member might be perfectly capable of expressing disagreement with, even making fun of, certain aspects of the party line—especially over beer. But one can never be quite sure how to interpret this. One is never quite sure when one is talking to the individual and when to the party member, to what degree they overlap, to what degree there might be inner doubts, to what degree the performance of inner doubts might be a strategic ploy, whether the person flirting with you is doing so because they actually find you attractive, or because someone else, someone you've never met, decided you are a possible recruit and encouraged them to do so. Such things simply cannot be known. It is precisely questions like these that lead many anarchists to think of such groups as little better than cults, or that generate rumors about their internal sexual politics (for instance, that members are expected only to get romantically involved with other members, or that they are even paired off by their superiors, that female members of the group are expected to make themselves sexually available to the Leader, and so on)—rumors that I have heard about many such groups, and, of course, have absolutely no way to confirm. In many cases, such rumors are almost certainly untrue. Still, they tend to be remarkably similar to those that almost invariably come to surround religious groups also labeled "cults," and that is in itself significant.

To some degree, this is exactly what one would expect when one combines intense personal commitment and a relatively formal, top-down organizational structure. Anarchist groups and networks tend to be based, in contrast, on what are, essentially, webs of highly personal relations. They involve very few purely formal, impersonal mechanisms, except perhaps for the role of the facilitator. As a result they have developed—again, often in quite conscious contradistinction to the sectarians—a kind of ideal of moral transparency, and an ethos of solidarity. The ideal of transparency is, of course, just that, an ideal; no one imagines it is completely achievable. Nonetheless, part of the aim of anti-authoritarian organizing is to create an environment where at the very least one *could* be honest about one's motives or imperatives, since there is no compelling reason not to be.[12] "Solidarity," in turn, means a freely chosen decision to defer to the motives or imperatives of others. Jessica's description of the pleasure one feels in freely deciding to treat one's own opinion as unimportant could be seen as the intellectual equivalent. As any anarchist would stress, if there's any moral pressure applied, it's not really solidarity. This is why anarchist labor unions in Spain in the early part of the century insisted that anyone who voted against a strike was not obliged to respect the picket line (they usually ended up getting 100% compliance as a result), or why nowadays those practicing jail solidarity, in which activists clog the prison system by refusing to give their names, always insist that if anyone has a personal reason to opt out, it is a matter of principle to reassure them that no one will think the less of them for doing so. If there's pressure, then, it's not real solidarity. But neither is it solidarity if one sees oneself as primarily trying to advance one's own interests. Malcolm, one of the stalwarts of DAN Labor, used to get into endless arguments with ISO members who occasionally participated in the working group, when he told them he thought they didn't practice solidarity at all. "It's true," he told us one night at some local bar. "If you look at the ISO charter, it actually says that, in the event of a conflict, the organizational imperatives of the party must always take precedence over the interests of your allies, cause, or coalition. If you're only helping other people in order to pursue your own agenda, you're not practicing solidarity. They always get really pissed off when I point that out to them."

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[12] At the very least, one might say, they create an environment where if one is flirting with someone for ulterior motives, one can be fairly certain they are one's own ulterior motives, and not those of one's superiors.

3) The Internet

Normally, when one initiates a new group, network, or coalition, the first move is to hold a meeting. The new group decides on a decision-making process and agrees on principles of unity, as well as choosing a time and place for future meetings. Sometimes they also come up with a name, though often that comes later. But the real mark that such a group actually exists is the establishment of a web site and a listserv. Web sites need a fair amount of maintenance. If a group fades away, the web site simply sits there, often for years without updates. Activist listservs, on the other hand, require very little maintenance, so it often seems that once started, they never go away. Groups may stop meeting, and effectively no longer exist, but the listserv will continue as a means for announcing events or, sometimes, limited discussion for years afterwards. When asking about such groups—the Connecticut Global Action Network, for example, or Texas DAN—I was usually told, "Well, it's basically become a listserv."

Ever since shortly after Seattle, when Naomi Klein (2001) described the decentralized network organization of new activist groups as echoing the structure and spirit of the Internet, endless ink has been spilled on the relation between anarchist organizing and new information technologies. Certainly, such links exist. Many of the new global networks or alliances, like PGA or Indymedia, would have been inconceivable without the Internet. At the same time, the influence of the Internet has been much more complicated than is usually represented. First of all, everyone I knew acknowledged that, while it is a remarkable tool for disseminating information, one cannot use the Internet to make decisions. Considering the importance of decision-making process, that's an extremely significant limitation. Instead, one tends to encounter, on activist listservs, a style of debate that by definition cannot lead to collective decisions, and that, for many embodies everything that consensus-oriented decision-making process should not be.

"The problem with email," Enos once told me, "is that it's so much like speech. You wake up one morning and you haven't had your coffee and you read something that pisses you off. So you dash off a reply. And, maybe ten minutes later, you already think better of it—but it's too late. You can't take it back. It's out there on a thousand machines and, even if you send off an apology a minute later, or try to have it erased from the server, someone in Cleveland might find it on their hard drive five years from now and get mad at you. It's like you think you're just muttering into your coffee, but it ends up inscribed on the side of an Egyptian pyramid." From many activists' point of view, listservs do seem to combine the worst aspects of speech and writing: the casual thoughtlessness of one, the permanence of the other. And, whatever the reasons, debate on listservs tends towards everything that consensus meetings try to avoid: posturing, grandiose claims, sarcasm, insults, grand accusations of sexism, racism, stupidity, reformism, hypocrisy. After monitoring activist listservs for years, I can affirm it is almost impossible to find a discussion of a hot-button issue that does not eventually revert to some kind of flame war, usually based on a style of debate—a kind of pugilistic, macho mock-rationalism—that one simply never witnesses in informal face-to-face settings, at least between activists who assume they have anything in common.[13] Without any of the mechanisms to defuse such conflicts (no facilitator, no twinkles, no body language, above all no way to hear if the entire audience is groaning or clearly wishes you would cut it out), conflicts tend to escalate. As activist women endlessly point out, the resulting debate tends to be conducted almost entirely by males. This is partly because of the tone of debate, partly, too, because the apparently impersonal medium allows male participants to revert to sometimes striking patterns of sexism that one could never imagine them employing in person: for instance, systematically replying to female (as opposed to male) posters not with counter-arguments, but with condescension or speculations about the poster's personal qualities. Those few activist women who do haunt email forums tend to do so because they like to give as good as they get, and are, if anything, even more contentious than the men. At any rate, DAN listserv debates would usually flare up for a day or two and almost invariably end when one or another of DAN's central women would appear to remark on the sexist nature of the exchange, the absence of female voices, and tell the men to cut it out.[14]

So we are back to the same question posed in the section on sectarianism: if one's movement does not emerge from theory, or intellectual debate, from a prior analysis of the world situation—then from what, exactly, does it emerge?

Understandings Emergent from Practice

Let me map out what I take to be the salient features of consensus-based decision-making.

First and foremost, consensus is a way to reach decisions consistent with a society that does not employ systematic violence to enforce decisions. It is an attempt to find a moral formula that maximizes individual autonomy and commitment to community at the same time. In a way—despite the explicit rejection of the kind of theory-driven version of Marxism typical of so many sectarian Marxist groups—this is perfectly consistent with other strains of Marxian thought. It is no coincidence, I think, that the Marxist theorist most admired by American anarchists today is not in fact Antonio Negri, but John Holloway, almost unknown in the American academy, but whose works—particularly *Change the World without Taking Power* (2002)—can be found in just about any anarchist infoshop in North America.

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[13] It's quite common to encounter individuals who are notorious for being mild-mannered and inoffensive in person, but extremely aggressive on the Internet. I've never heard of cases where it was the other way around.

[14] The emphasis on face-to-face meetings and a verbal culture might be part of the reason for the surprising rift, mentioned above, between anarchist theory, or anarchist writing in general, and anarchist practice. On web pages, for instance, one begins to see some of the same radical anti-organizational, Primitivist, individualist, or sectarian voices that one encounters in the pages of long-running anarchist periodicals. The only similarity seems to be that these are written forums where there is no immediate present audience.

Holloway argues that the very idea that a political party could be in possession of the true, "scientific" understanding of the world does violence to everything that was truly revolutionary in Marx's own ideas. Adopting a distinction, originating from both the radical feminist (e.g., Starhawk 1987), and Italian Autonomist (e.g. Virno & Hardt 1996; Negri 1999) branches of the movement, between the power to act or create, and the power to constrain or subordinate others—often phrased as a distinction between "power-to" and "power-over"—he distinguishes two corresponding forms of knowledge. One is knowledge immanent in practice, in some active project of creation or social transformation, the other, which he calls "knowledge-about," pretends to float above such subjective forms of knowledge and attain true scientific objectivity. In its pretense of mastery and transcendence, its tendency to reduce a world of processes into fixed, self-identical objects that can then become the objects of comprehensive knowledge, "knowledge-about" is the perfect complement to "power-over." As Marx demonstrated so well, the powerful are always trying to reduce complex processes of making and doing into fixed objects which they can claim to own. Capital itself is the ultimate example. Their "science" becomes the means by which they do so.

Like all such grand formulations, Holloway's is no doubt a bit of a simplification. Still, I think there is something profoundly true here—and something important for present purposes, if only because his analysis emerges from precisely the intellectual-practical tradition from which consensus process itself emerged. One might begin, then, by arguing that consensus is an approach that replaces ideology, "knowledge-about," with forms of knowledge immanent in practice. As I've written elsewhere (2002, 2003), its practice *is* its ideology. I've also pointed out that, unlike sectarian groups, consensus-based groups tend to avoid debating, let alone basing their identity, on questions of definition. Instead, they always try to bring things back to questions of action. So my first suggestion is that we look at this as if we were dealing with a political ontology that assumes that actions, and not objects, are the primary reality.

If so, I think the rest falls fairly easily into place:

1) Any consensus group—whether a tiny affinity group or a vast network—is based on **founding principles**. These principles tend to refer to what the group does, or hopes to accomplish (its "*purposes* or reasons for being") and how it organizes itself to go about doing it. In other words, the group itself is a project of action. In other consensus trainings, experienced facilitators would emphasize to me that whenever there seems to be an intractable problem or difference of opinion, the best approach is always to remind members of the group of their reasons for being. "No matter what kind of common project it may be, even if it's five students living in a house together, always start by everyone agreeing on something they want to be able to accomplish together. Because when you all start arguing about the dishes, the best way to keep people from going for each other's throats will always be to go back to that." Of course, blocks have to be rooted in these principles as well: one can only bring a particular course of action to a halt by asserting it contradicts those more general purposes.

2) **The assumption of diversity**. Once the focus is on common action, rather than agreement about the nature of some higher Truth or set of definitions or correct analysis, it becomes easier to see how a diversity of perspectives can come to seem a strength rather than a weakness. The fact that human beings live in incommensurable worlds has rarely prevented them from effectively pursuing common projects. It might seem contradictory—a philosopher might argue that if people live in incommensurable worlds, it is impossible for them to pursue the same ends because they could not even agree on what those ends even are—but this is the kind of objection that emerges from a world which starts from Platonic forms and tries to reason its way from those forms to explain empirical reality. Or, as Holloway would put it, that begins from "knowledge-about." The fact is that all perspectives are to a certain degree incommensurable, and people do work together nonetheless. To go back to the example of deciding which restaurant to go to: economists are aware that even such basic calculations as "which is the best restaurant for the money?" cannot be formally modeled, because one is talking about incommensurable qualities: quantitative versus qualitative, cardinal versus ordinal. Mathematically, such calculations are quite impossible. It doesn't stop ordinary people from making them all the time. All real-world decision making is, in fact, a series of formally impossible compromises between incommensurable terms. This is true even if just one person is making the decision; it is all the more so when many are. So, on the one hand, diversity is inevitable.[15]

Academic observers, exposed to a perspective that rejects any notion of transcendent truth and celebrates diversity, tend to see the phenomenon as a form of

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[15] It's also desirable: if one is trying to solve a problem, or carry out a task, it's almost always going to be easier to do so with a group of five different people than with a group of identical clones.

"postmodernism." Most activists who are not themselves academics dislike such terms—if only because it seems silly to attach an ideological label to an anti-ideological attitude.[16] They are more likely to see what they are doing as returning to principles of simple decency and common sense—of returning, if one must use the term, to a world in which much of what we refer to as "modernity" never happened.

From my early fieldnotes:

> **Notebooks July 2000**
>
> Adopting a consensus approach tends to make everything a compromise and promotes a particular sort of view of truth, one which is not quite relativistic, perhaps, but more an awareness that truth is somewhat patched together. The decision-making process clearly does affect the overall intellectual attitude. All statements are collective—which can sometimes make them bland, but never hidebound. Large areas are always left moot, i.e., is the main problem capitalism, or lack of democracy? Do we want a state? Of course, all this has much to be with the diversity of positions within DAN, but it's also true that DAN actively seeks that kind of diversity. If you ask one of the DAN core group what kind of economic institutions they envision for a future society, they are likely to tell you that's not for them to decide: they're trying to create the democratic institutions which will allow people to figure out such questions for themselves. Even when it comes to anarchism—while most participants do seem to be anarchists, there are a smattering of Marxists, liberal reformists, even NGO types. None of this is considered a problem, as far as I can make out, unless they seem to be speaking not for themselves but for an organization. The slogan might be "as long as you're willing to act like an anarchist in the present, your long-term vision is pretty much up to you."

3) **The ethos of mutual solidarity**, as observed, combines an emphasis on individual autonomy with commitment to others. The assumption here is that individual freedom is not the absence of commitments or entanglements, but, rather, that it largely consists in the freedom to decide for oneself to which projects or communities one wishes to commit.

This is, anyway, the way one might approach the idea from the perspective of the individual. From the perspective of the group, one might argue that the ethos of solidarity arises from a central principle of anarchism: that just as those who are treated like children will tend to behave like children, the best way to minimize selfish, spiteful, duplicitous, or petty behavior is by effectively daring people to be mature. By granting each member of the group the right to block, one forces each to be keenly aware that they could throw the group into havoc at any point. This, and the refusal to apply moral pressure, makes it extremely difficult for anyone to cast themselves in the role of the victim or to tell themselves they're only doing what they have to do to win a pre-established political game.[17] It's a little like handing everyone who walks into the room a hand grenade, just to show you trust them not to use it. Yet it tends to prove surprisingly effective.

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[16] Reclaim the Streets London summed up the prevailing attitude rather nicely on its web page: "People around RTS are firmly opposed to totalising ideologies. That's not to say there's much sympathy for postmodernism or anything. That's mostly an academic aberration to be kicked over on the path towards whatever really comes after modernism" (http://rts.gn.apc.org/ideas.htm, accessed June 20, 2005).

Here, the principles of group autonomy and individual moral autonomy reinforce each other. Anarchist groups, for example, tend to be very uncomfortable about outside funding. More than once, I have seen groups thrown into a minor crisis when an outsider offers a few hundred dollars' contribution, even if the gift appears to have no strings attached. Such offers are often refused outright, for fear that any group that starts accepting outside funding might eventually end up policing themselves for fear of alienating a potential funding base. The ultimate ideal in such groups is always to create a situation where there's nothing standing between one's moral sense and one's ability to act on it, no reason *not* to say exactly what one believes, or do what one thinks is right, where there is no need for stratagems.

Another way to put it might be this: the aim is to create an environment where if someone behaves generously, or obnoxiously, one can be relatively sure it is because they actually are generous or obnoxious. The paradox is that this attempt to create the conditions for moral transparency can only be maintained by a kind of constant game of make-believe. Hence, the insistence that one must never cast doubt on another's motives, one must always give them the benefit of the doubt for honesty and good intentions (regardless of what one may think of them personally). Insisting on treating everyone like responsible adults may not always guarantee mature behavior, but in my own experience it does prove surprisingly effective—and that very fact tends to startle almost everyone who first becomes involved in anarchist groups, since, after all, it directly contradicts almost everything we are taught to think about human nature. It has much to do with why people often remark that such experiences transform their very sense of human possibilities.

Still, there is one very problematic corollary. While this generosity of spirit is one of the essential principles of consensus decision-making, it has the effect of requiring such groups, for all the open-endedness of their networks, to draw very clear lines between some kind of inner circle, and everybody else. I will return to this point later.

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[17] Obviously, human beings can be infinitely creative in such matters and if a person is absolutely determined to put together a narrative in which they are a victim, there's always a way to do so. Still, it's remarkable how rarely this happens.

SECTION III: PROBLEMS

Despite all this (or perhaps because of it), it is very common to see a pattern of exaltation followed by burn-out. Those drawn into the world of horizontal organizing will often find the experience amazing, liberating, transformative; it will open their eyes to entirely new horizons of human possibility. Six months later, they may just as well quit in disgust. Or the groups they were working with may dissolve in bitter recriminations. The recriminations are almost never about the process itself, however. In America, at least, in nine cases out of ten, they turn on arguments about race—and, secondarily, class and gender—especially, whether the obsession with consensus process and direct democracy, or even direct action, are themselves forms of white privilege.

As we've seen, such arguments go back at least to the 1960s, when exponents of the emerging Black Power movement began making an issue of consensus as a way of isolating white members of the SNCC (Polletta 2002). Even around 2000, there was still a lingering sense that consensus was somehow a white, middle-class phenomenon; anti-racist trainers were prone to lecture DAN-style activists on the arrogance of assuming that their approaches to organization were in any way morally superior to those employed by other communities—no matter how hierarchical they might seem. There is a certain irony here, since, in most parts of the world, the situation is quite the reverse.[18]

Some of the basis of these objections was eroded as groups based in communities of color began adopting some of the same techniques. But there was clearly an element of truth here. The style of comportment expected at DAN meetings did, I think, reflect—or perhaps it's better to say, was informed by—certain very white, middle-class understandings of sociality: the need to suppress unseemly emotions, particularly contentious or angry ones, the emphasis on keeping up the appearance of mutual civility, or of appearances more generally, while at the same time avoiding dramatic, performative gestures. Insofar as this was actually enforced, or even made explicit, it was normally by appeal to feminism: particularly the rejection of macho male posturing. Obviously, this was a powerful argument. Certainly, no one was willing to make a serious argument in favor of displays of personal rage or macho posturing. Still, one could also argue there was a fine line between creating a "safe" environment for women and playing the stereotypical role of the gracious upper-middle-class hostess, who is expected to perform the endless work of smoothing over differences, and maintain a constant agreeable façade so as to keep the business of sociality running effectively. If nothing else, I have, over time, noticed certain quite disturbing patterns. For example, anarchist or activist collectives do, on occasion, expel members for disruptive behavior. In my experience, though, just about every single individual so banned has been either of working-class background or a person of color. Usually, the specific reasons for an expulsion—extreme substance abuse, aggressive or violent behavior—seem obviously justified. But in New York I have yet to hear of a specific example of a white activist of upper-middle-class background kicked out of an anarchist collective, or even, for that matter, referred to as a "wingnut." "Wingnut" in particular is essentially a class term: rich people might be labeled "eccentrics," but almost never "wingnuts."[19]

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[18] Among the Zapatistas, for example, the Mestizo military leadership like Marcos tends to be suspicious of consensus, while it's the indigenous base who have insisted on it as the only approach in accord with their traditional values.

NYC DAN was, as I've noted, an extremely white group, strikingly so considering the demographics of the city.[20] For the first year or so of its existence, the group was in a continual crisis over what to do about this fact. This is a pattern repeated endlessly in my own experience: a group of largely white activists will gather together and form a group, then immediately begin agonizing over how to deal with their own skewed composition.[21] Essentially, there are two approaches one can take. One can opt for a recruitment model, and try to encourage activists of color to join one's network, or an alliance model, which assumes that most people of color will prefer to form organizations based around their own affinities based in shared experiences of oppression, and that it's the role of more privileged, largely white organizations instead to support their struggles. In the end, it normally comes down to the latter. Arguments about race then become entangled in arguments about privilege, about who has the means to engage in "summit hopping," or the tendency of middle-class white activists to take on abstract issues like the WTO rather than working with communities "most affected" by neoliberal policies at home. These are critical issues, but in practice, they are often paralyzing, and have led to the destruction of literally hundreds of radical projects. However, owing to the demographics of groups like DAN, they were more strategic questions than questions of actual meeting dynamics.

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[19] One way to put this might be that when people of more privileged backgrounds do become emotionally or psychologically unstable, the way they typically act on it is not considered as inherently disruptive. One friend of mine of working-class origins was effectively pressured out of a housing collective because of a conflict with another woman, of a wealthy background, who was actually acknowledged to be suffering from some form of mental illness (she used to wander around the collective house in her underwear at odd hours of the night rearranging furniture, etc, and would invent peculiar accusations against the woman she decided was her enemy). When the first woman brought the matter up, she was told it was unfair to make an issue with the other's mental disabilities; at the same time, her own occasional displays of temper at meetings were considered absolutely unacceptable.

[20] Most of its key participants seem to have been exactly the sort of people who, forty years earlier, might have been founding members of SDS.

[21] Of course, to some degree, this skewed composition is statistically inevitable, since it is assumed that many activists of color will prefer to work in identity-based groups, but those identified as "white" will work only in multiracial ones.

Questions of gender were more subtle. As I've explained, the consensus process used by groups like DAN emerges largely from within feminism, from a rebellion against the standards of the 1960s New Left. If one simply looks at the habits of speech or styles of personal bearing common to 1960s radicalism—or that one still often sees among 1960s veterans today—and compares them to the way people act in groups like DAN, the change is palpable. Body language seems to have changed completely. Where once the style was to thrust oneself forward and speechify, where once the performance of militancy and what one might call theoretical virility seemed omnipresent, one observes a very self-conscious effort of self-effacement. Men, especially, tend to lean back instead of forwards; they do so especially while speaking. They tend to make constant little gestures of deference to the larger group. Any sign of macho posturing, oratory, or general self-importance will tend to be noticed, and widely criticized offstage.

One could go further. The classic stereotype of gender relations within the movement in the 1960s was that the men made speeches and plans, the women did the boring and thankless clerical and organizational work that was required to bring those plans into being. Then, once the work was done, the men assumed center stage again—whether as streetfighters, orators, or even hunger strikers—to star on the public stages the women had, effectively, constructed. Now, such patterns have by no means completely disappeared. Perhaps, amongst those brought up in contemporary America, they could never be completely extirpated. In fact, they tend to reappear even in those groups most consciously opposed to mainstream gender stereotypes. As one ACT UP veteran put it, "the gay men would dream the beautiful dreams. Then the dykes would actually go out and make them happen."

On the other hand, the de-emphasis on ideology, speech-making, and charismatic authority, and corresponding emphasis on action, makes the entire process more resemble what used to be considered "women's work." At the same time, the absence of formal leadership positions means that one's prominence within the organization is directly proportional to the amount of work one is willing to do. The result was that, insofar as there was a tacit leadership structure within DAN, it was made up almost exclusively of women. If one had to name one person who most embodied the DAN project, it was Brooke, a student at the Institute for Social Ecology and direct democracy theorist in her late twenties who, coming from a wealthy family, was able to throw almost all of her free time into the group. Brooke essentially *was* the Nuts & Bolts working group; she did all the tedious organizing of agenda baskets and sign-up sheets and writing and rewriting of proposals about how to make proposals. She also was the core of the Continental DAN working group, and organized the national phonecall, even though she was rarely, technically, the spoke. If others showed up to any of these meetings, Brooke would always treat them as equals, but the fact remained that she was always there—she had the institutional memory, and everyone knew that, so if anyone had questions about matters of DAN's structure, it was to her they would always turn. It was the same with most of the structural working groups. During DAN's first year or so, for example, it was a woman (Nicky) who managed the web page, three women (Rachel, Vicky, Marina) who formed the core of the legal working group, another woman (Zosera), who effectively constituted the financial group, and so on. There were a handful of exceptions: the listserv manager was male, and so were the two people who made up the core of the media group, as well as, usually, the person who compiled the weekly events calendar. The outreach group was about evenly divided.[22] Still, the pattern was unmistakable.

So, while one did hear periodic carping about a tacit leadership structure, it often struck me as a trifle disingenuous. One of the first people I met in DAN was a former IWW activist named Sam who got involved shortly before me. Sam never tired of complaining about "the hierarchy," as he called them—several of whom he noted were of quite prosperous backgrounds—or of pointing out what he considered subtle indications that this core group really did consider themselves part of an elite. It wasn't entirely his imagination. I also began to notice how, for instance, at a big march or rally, where everyone was always asking others to relieve them of having to carry some sign or banner, it never seemed to occur to any of us to suggest such a thing to one of the women from, say, Nuts & Bolts or the Legal Team. One just had a sense they would feel it was beneath them. And, indeed, one never did see any of them carrying signs. As time went by, however, it became increasingly apparent that Sam's cynicism was directly related to the fact that he never, himself, *did* much of anything—aside, that is, from participating in the writing of statements, trying to steer discussion onto one or another fine point of anarchist theory, or engaging in heated debates on activist listservs. More than anything else, his indignation seemed to trace back to the fact that in DAN, such behavior was not, in itself, enough to win him respected status in the group.

All this might make it seem surprising that DAN was in an almost continual crisis over gender issues. The main problem was that so few women attended meetings. While proportions fluctuated over time, the gender ratio was often two to one in favor of men; at times, the numbers were even more skewed. I keep pretty careful records and I noticed there were distinct patterns in this fluctuation. Essentially, women tended to drop out when there wasn't any major action going on. This was when meetings were smallest anyway, but at such meetings, there might well be four men for every woman. In the months and weeks leading up to a major action, the percentage of women would steadily increase, often achieving near parity in the week or two before (though always near parity: I never observed a single large meeting in which women were the majority). During actions, it often seemed that women had the vast majority of the key roles: facilitators, tactical teams, media spokespeople, and the like. Then, after a few weeks, the bulk of the women would disappear, leaving mainly only those women who constituted part of DAN's core group—the tacit leadership—to carry on.

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[22] So were both of the permanent action groups: Labor and Police & Prisons, but they were not, in the same sense, structural.

The reason seemed to be that, especially in lull periods, women came to see the larger meetings as meaningless forums dominated by men who liked to hear themselves speak. Much of the meeting would be dominated by discussions of whether or not to endorse some other group's actions, or about the wording of some proposed outreach material. It might not have involved dramatic posturing and speechifying, but it was effectively the same thing.

There soon developed a sense that DAN meetings were not, in fact, an entirely comfortable space for women activists. Many did complain, and some began dropping out in frustration. Several organized a DAN women's caucus as a way to discuss the problem, and propose solutions. After meeting several times in Tompkins Square park, participants in the women's caucus decided to propose DAN use a "vibes watcher." This is a role quite familiar in activist circles on the West Coast; the main task of vibes watchers is to assist the facilitators by monitoring the general emotional feeling of the room, but in this case, the real emphasis was to have someone capable of monitoring gender dynamics and calling out sexist behavior. The account that follows—the ethnographic core of this section—is drawn from the DAN meeting on June 19, 2000; the second meeting at which this proposal was discussed.

The Saga of the Third Facilitator

Let me reproduce some bits, reconstructed from my notes, of what was probably the rowdiest DAN meeting I ever attended. In designing this chapter I was at first a bit hesitant to give it so much prominence, since it will mean that the only DAN meeting I'm reproducing in anything like its entirety was also an uniquely divisive one, full of accusations of sexism, class bias, and at least one participant who seemed to be a total lunatic. Still, it serves very nicely to bring out the tensions I've been describing, and to give the reader a sense of how they can—in worst-case scenario—play out in an actual meeting.

The meeting started around 5PM, with Lesley and a media activist named

Ernest as facilitators. It started with about thirty people in the room and peaked at around fifty-five. Mike, a graduate student in a green cap who began the meeting clinging to an enormous copy of *The Grundrisse*, was the official scribe. Tim, a transsexual activist with a group called Church Ladies for Choice, was the timekeeper. This particular meeting was also graced by a number of guests, who had, somewhat unfortunately, been put at the end of the agenda—notably, a fortyish union organizer named Nathan from Local 1199, in a UNITE cap, and a younger activist named Jack Griffin who came with a female partner and two ISO escorts to ask our support for a Laundry Strike on Long Island. [23] By the time I arrived and sat myself on the ground in the circle, we were deep into the discussion of the agenda. My notes begin somewhat schematically:

DAN General, Charas El Bohio
Sunday afternoon, June 19, 2000

We begin with a review of the agenda. Items on the agenda include actions in Windsor (placed under New Business), proposals for a teach-in, and Griffin's proposal about support for the Laundry Strike. After allocating time for each item, several people put up their hands to announce a series of emergency events:

Tim announces the 7th Annual Drag March, "celebrating drag culture, whatever that is." *This is, he explains, an event put on by the people excluded from the Gay Pride Parade, including his group, the Radical Faeries.* "Go in whatever drag you want whether it's corporate realism, suits, garters and pea-pods, whatever. We're also looking for marshals, who'll be wearing beads and bows."

Chris from Police & Prisons announces three important upcoming demos.

Cindy from Wetlands announces a big demo at The Gap, whose owners are also tied to the destruction of old growth forests on the West Coast.

Ana from IMC wishes to talk about actions being organized around the Millenium Summit at the UN. We add 5-10 minutes for this item at the end of New Business.

WORKING GROUP REPORT-BACKS

NUTS & BOLTS

Brooke: I'll just explain one change in "word doctoring insanity"…

Lesley: for those new, Nuts & Bolts does a lot of the…

Brooke: …the boring stuff…

Lesley: …that must, nonetheless, be done. Structural things like who actually keeps the basket with all the sign-up sheets, what are the rules for writing down proposals. Um, what's next? Financial?

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[23] Jack Griffin, laundry campaign national coordinator for the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE.).

> **FINANCIAL**
>
> Rebecca: We had $91.00 in the hat last time we checked.
>
> Jordan: We really need some ideas on fund-raising. Passing the hat once a week is just not a viable long-term approach.
>
> *Ernest*: Is anyone actually from the fund-raising working group here?
>
> [*Apparently not; Zosera is late, no one is sure if anyone else is in it.*]
>
> Jordan: Well, anyway, people should *think* about the problem.
>
> *Ernest*: And meanwhile, come to think about it, does anyone actually have a hat they'd like to contribute to pass around this week? At the very least we'd like to be able to offer something to Charas for the room. [*Someone offers their baseball cap. It starts going around the circle.*]
>
> *Lesley*: All right, Communications? [*Not here.*] Legal?

And so it went. After a word from Marina in Legal, and Ernest on media issues (Wolfensohn, the head of the World Bank, had appeared at a press conference in Amsterdam, accusing the Ruckus Society of teaching kids to make molotov cocktails; Ruckus might sue, but it's not clear if Dutch law allows it.), Brooke provided an update on work on the CDAN principles, and Jordan of DAN Labor announced news of their support of the strike at the Museum of Modern Art.

> Jordan: It's a rowdy, really wild picket line. We've brought puppets, always brought numbers, played a really positive role in radicalizing people, but at the same time respecting their attitudes. Two weeks ago, we managed to shut down the MoMA bookstore for forty-five minutes with a piece of guerilla theater. No one was arrested. Last week, Andrew managed to affix strike stickers on a half dozen partygoers at a party for David Rockefeller. (laughs) We're always threatened, but never arrested.
>
> Remember, folks: there's people fighting capitalism on a day-to-day basis and they're called labor unions.
>
> Bob: Remember, we have some new people here. Perhaps you can take a few seconds to explain why the MoMA workers are on strike?
>
> Jordan: Sure. There're basically three issues: the lack of a contract, attempts to bust the union, and there are health care and salary issues, too. DAN Labor meets every Tuesday at ABC No Rio, a former squat and community center on Rivington. Everyone should come. (Is that okay?)

We continue through Police & Prisons, the August 1 Coalition preparing for the RNC protests, until we finally get to what everyone knows is going to be the real bone of contention—the "facilitation proposal." Two women from the

Women's Caucus, sitting in the northwest corner of the room near the facilitators, present it:

> Marina: A lot of the women in DAN have been talking informally, and there have been a lot of complaints about the way things have been going over the last couple of months. There were points where the gender balance at meetings was two-to-one, three-to-one, even four-to-one in favor of men. It's begun to get a little better over the last couple weeks, but, there's still something very wrong here. So we've been trying to brainstorm some ideas on how to create a climate which women will find more inviting or comfortable.
>
> Miriam: One way we came up with was to create a Women's Caucus. The idea would be to make it as diverse as possible (we especially want to reach out to transgendered people); and that it could be a space where people could talk about new approaches to facilitation, about how to ensure more dialogue in meetings about sex and race and gender.
>
> We've come up with a few suggestions:
>
> First, we're proposing facilitators make it a habit to place people from under-represented groups at the top of the stack.
>
> Second, we want to put more emphasis on greeting and encouraging of new people.
>
> Third, we're proposing DAN get what's loosely called a "vibes watcher," someone who can constantly monitor the numbers—how meetings break down in terms of race, and gender, to alert people if the numbers drop, and who will be able to use certain tools to intervene if there are serious problems.
>
> *Lesley*: Well, my vibes watch tells me this corner of the room (*gesturing towards the north*) is speaking far more than any of the others.
>
> Okay, maybe we'd better take this proposal piece by piece. What's the first part?
>
> Miriam: Putting under-represented groups at the top of the queue.
>
> *Lesley*: Any discussion?
>
> Tim: You know, you can also do the same thing sometimes just by calling on people who haven't spoken before.
>
> Some Male: I think it will hardly help very much.
>
> *Lesley*: So are you registering a serious objection?
>
> Male: I'm just skeptical.
>
> *Lesley*: Any more discussion? [*Silence*] If not, I'm just going to move straight to consensus. All right: any stand-asides? [*No*]. Any blocks? [*No*].
>
> Bob: I have a point of process. Can you quickly explain these terms—stand-asides, blocks—for people who might not understand them? We have a lot of new people in the room.

Lesley: Oh, yes, good idea. [*Does so*] All right, that was easy. Any discussion on #2?

David: I really think having a greeter would be extremely important. You don't know how alienating it can be to just show up to one of these meetings cold. And I'd say that most people who just show up out of curiosity don't come back because, unless they already know someone, there's almost no chance they'll get to meet or talk to any DANsters.

Marina: Another thing we were thinking of is having orientation literature to hand out.

Ernest: This issue sounds like something it would be good to discuss over the listserv.

Lesley: Actually, I'd say that anything having to do with gender issues is something we *shouldn't* be discussing over the listserv.

Brooke: You know, it strikes me this whole proposal should be for the creation of a new working group.

Miriam: We've been thinking about it more as a caucus. In which case, we really don't need to have the group consense on its creation.

Lesley: Shall we talk about this issue after we finish with the business at hand?

Brooke: Well, you know, if you meet on a weekly basis, you essentially are talking about a working group—whatever you call it.

Miriam: No. It's a caucus. So far, we've mainly been meeting informally.

Brooke: Well, okay, I guess it hardly matters. Though if you're going to be conducting a training for facilitators, that's technically the domain of Nuts & Bolts. Maybe we should work together.

Mac: I really don't think it's a good idea that we set a precedent that everyone else should have to agree before women (or for example queers) are allowed to form a caucus.

Sam: I've had my hand up for a while.

Lesley: Okay.

Sam: I think it would be helpful for newcomers to define the difference between a caucus and a working group.

Lesley: Well, it's not completely clear. Caucuses are kind of a new idea. We've never explicitly discussed what a caucus would be. But my guess would be a group of people who feel an affinity of some kind, who want to get together to discuss their issues and affinities. That's pretty much it.

Ernest: [*responding to a signal from Tim*] The five minutes we've allocated for this discussion is over. I think we should go to New Business.

Miriam: I understand that but I think this discussion is important.

Marina: We're discussing this because more and more women have stopped coming to meetings. So I'd say this is pretty important for the group as a whole.

Ernest: Shall we extend the time five more minutes then?

[*Various people twinkle*]

Lesley: Well, technically, we're still on the second point, greeting new people. I haven't heard any serious concerns about that part. Maybe we'll just get through that so we can move on to #3. Any stand-asides for the greeters? Any blocks? [*No*].

Okay, we have consensus. Miriam, maybe you should restate the proposal about the vibes watcher.

Miriam: Sure. Normally, the role of a vibes watcher is to monitor the emotional dynamics of a meeting—if people are getting bored, or irritable, or if there's someone who feels alienated, they point it out, and there are various tools they can use to intervene, ranging from opening windows to get more air in the room, or asking people to speak louder so someone with a hearing-aid can participate, to, in an extreme case, stopping discussion and having thirty seconds or a minute of silence for people to calm down. If there's someone in the group who's acting systematically disruptive, they might try to talk with that person, draw their attention to the effects of their behavior. Or even, if nothing else works call a time-out specifically for them. We felt that training a vibes watcher to pay particular attention to gender and racial dynamics might help to create an atmosphere here that would not turn so many women and people of color off.

Lesley: Clarifying questions? [*No*]. Concerns?

Tim: Myself, I would prefer not having a specific person named to this function, because, well… everyone has their own issues and priorities. A straight person might not be able to detect a homophobic vibe. Or someone like me, who's thirty-eight, might not be the best person to perceive ageism. Shouldn't we all be monitoring this sort of thing? And all be empowered to intervene if something needs to be pointed out to the group?

Miriam: Sure, in theory, that *should* be the way things work. The problem is people haven't been doing that. That's why we had to develop this proposal in the first place.

Sara: I think this is extremely important. A couple weeks ago, some of us tried to point out an example of blatant sexist behavior at the meeting—guys talking over women, cutting them off. But, when we tried to point out that women were being stepped on, there was a huge push in the room to drive the conversation back to issues of class. As if coming from a working-class background somehow justifies this kind of behavior. Now, I agree we shouldn't dwell on this sort of thing so much that we bring our real work to a standstill,

> but I want to have someone at the head of the room who I know is an advocate for people like me.
>
> *Lesley*: I see three more hands and we're almost out of time. Oh, four.
>
> Stuart: I have an idea for a specific proposal, or, hopefully, this can be a friendly amendment. Why don't we try using a vibes watcher for, say, four meetings? And after that we can set aside some time to assess if it's working, if it should be continued, how it can be improved.

It was at this point Dennis stood up. I should explain something about Dennis. Dennis was a man who looked a bit, and sounded almost exactly, like Robert DeNiro. Except that he was substantially larger. He was about forty-five years old, stocky, with the manner of a bus or subway conductor, which, rumor had it, he had actually been before going on mental disability some several years before. Dennis had a very loud voice, his own personal megaphone, and a tendency to be extremely confrontational (though never quite actually violent) at demos. He also seemed to be entirely oblivious to the principles of consensus and was almost certainly the man Sara was referring to in her complaints about making excuses for supposed working-class behavior.

> Dennis: This issue is a result of, from my point of view, if this is happening, what I think is it's because the facilitator didn't do his job. This whole vibe concept sounds crazy to me. If you make one person's subjective point of view binding on everybody else, well, isn't that the definition of oppression? What we really need to do is to employ *Robert's Rules of Order*, which could provide a certain level of organization to the meeting.

This was typical Dennis. He tended to start with what might seem a perfectly reasonable point, then fly off into total cluelessness. People try to remain poker-faced until he finished his elaboration on the advantages of *Robert's Rules*.

> Cindy: I agree it's everyone's responsibility to monitor these things. Technically, it should be possible to offer points of information or points of process without having to wait through the stack, and while DAN doesn't do that very much, maybe we should develop that as a way to deal with these kind of issues as well. Develop a specific hand-signal for instance.
>
> Mike: What we really need is an ongoing discussion. We've been discussing solutions here without ever discussing the problem itself. The thing that makes sexism, or racism, so insidious is that they can often be incredibly subtle. We're talking about forms of power and oppression so deeply internalized, they often linger in the background, informing what we say and do in ways we'd

never be able to detect. Could we really train people to reliably pick up on such things? Seems to me, we need to figure out a way to get more at the root of the problem—not that I'm sure exactly what that would be, but I'm just not sure these tools would really be adequate to the task.

Miriam: But that's just the idea—to be able to alert people to subtle forms of racist or sexist behavior they might not be aware of. If you have a better way, I'd love to hear it. Oh, and in response to Stuart's point: Sure. I'm okay with the idea of a three- or four-week test period.

Lesley: I see two more hands.

Max: Why all the discussion? Why not just propose that it can be cancelled if it doesn't work?

Ernest: Well, this is a way we can get consensus, since we've been hearing a few concerns.

Brooke: We should definitely hold a meeting to train potential vibes-watchers. That way we can develop a pool of people who have some idea how to do this. Because uncompassionate calling out of others' behavior can be really destructive.

Rachel: For me, though, it doesn't make sense to have the Women's Caucus itself carry out the trainings. I'd say we should set aside time in the general meeting, with the idea that it would lead up to a training we could hold next week.

Lesley: We seem to be moving to a different proposal there. Let's just limit ourselves to the creation of the vibes watcher, then talk about trainings later. Since we're way over time, I'm going to move to consensus. Any stand-asides?

Mike: Yeah. I'm standing aside. I mean, I'm not opposed to the idea of getting smart people to keep an eye out for this sort of thing, but it seems weird to appoint one person to monitor everyone else.

Sam: Intelligence has nothing to do with it.

Lesley: I'm just looking for stand-asides here. Not discussion.

George: I'm standing aside. It seems to me too much like a thought-police. But I'm willing to wait and see how it works.

Lesley: Okay, any blocks?

Mike: Maybe I could suggest an amendment that we work out specific guidelines, so we'll be clear on *how* this will all work? I think that would help put a lot of people's minds at rest.

Lesley: That sounds helpful, but at the moment we're just trying to go through *this* proposal. Any blocks?

And, in fact, there were. Three. One was from one of the union people, Nathan, in the UNITE cap. One was from Dennis. Things started degenerating rapidly at this point.

> *Lesley*: So that proposal is…
>
> Dennis: I would like to make what I think would be a constructive…
>
> Amy: Ahem. This is classic sexist behavior, to interrupt women in the middle of a sentence. Let alone the facilitator.
>
> *Ernest*: We're at twenty-five minutes now for a discussion that was supposed to take five. Shall we table this for next week?
>
> Stuart: Or continue on the listserv?
>
> Amy: Next week we're not meeting because of the Gay Pride parade. Also there's a really strong sentiment in the Women's Caucus *not* to just take it to the listserv. First of all, there still are a few of us benighted souls that are not on email. Second of all, if we're having meetings where some women don't feel comfortable, the last thing we want to do is move the discussion to email, which as an environment is a million times worse.

Dennis had had his hand up ever since he was cut off, waving it frantically. Ernest wanted to move to the next item on the agenda, a discussion of supporting civil disobedience at the School of the Americas. Others insisted we continue discussion of the vibes watcher. A couple of people volunteered to knock their own items off this week's agenda to make time. Someone pointed out that Zosera, one of the very few DAN regulars who's African American, who had come in at the very beginning of the discussion, now had her hand up as well.

> Zosera: You know I can't fail but notice that those who have been the most vocal in opposing this idea—well, I don't think it's an accident that they've all been white men. Maybe they don't see the point because *they* rarely feel marginalized; *they* always feel empowered to speak. But when you start opposing this idea in the name of democracy, talking about "oppression," I really have to start wondering what planet you're on. For me, democracy is about participatory parity. When a whole category of people is marginalized, and ends up unable to participate on an equal basis, *that's* oppression. Not some guy having to worry that for once in his life, he might be called out on his behavior. The measure of our success is the kind of climate we create and, if DAN creates a climate that denies parity, then DAN itself becomes a form of oppression. You want to create a racist organization? Fine, go ahead. You want to create a sexist organization? Fine, go ahead. But at least don't claim that you're doing it in the name of democracy!
>
> *Lesley*: Miriam, someone tells me you have another proposal?
>
> Miriam: Yes. I propose that we discuss this for two weeks on the listserv, and then take it up again at the next meeting, when we come back after Gay Pride.

Rachel: I'd like to offer an amendment: that discussion starts with the need for a training on community building within DAN.

Miriam: Okay. I'll accept that as a friendly amendment.

Ernest: Any stand-asides? No? Any blocks?

Tim: I'll block.

Miriam: You'll *block*?

Tim: I'm only blocking the part about the listserv. Because as Amy points out, we're not all on it, and it's not the ideal forum to discuss such things. Obviously, I wouldn't block taking up discussion again.

Ernest: I'm seeing a second block here. Dennis?

Dennis: I am blocking in relation to what I recall having heard about the DAN belief system, which causes me to believe that this proposal is in conflict with these values. I agree with everything the lady said about oppression, but since we already have an infrastructure for this, this measure is unnecessary. This should be the job of the facilitator. Furthermore, this group needs to have open discussion without censorship.

Lesley: So you're saying we can't…

Rebecca: Point of process!

Lesley: Yes! Please! Help me here!

I had never seen a meeting with this many blocks. Remember the general understanding is that, if there's a block, even if there's a large number of stand-asides, there has probably been a lapse in process. Rebecca tried to ride in to the rescue, with a suggestion that, on any other day, Lesley would probably have disapproved of.

Rebecca: You know, it's my understanding we *do* have an option for modified consensus. If you first attempt to address the blocker's concerns, and if that proves completely impossible, you can go forward to a two-thirds majority vote.

Ernest: An important point! This is the second time we've been unable to come to consensus around this issue. So I guess we have here an historic moment: the first time DAN has actually moved to modified consensus…

Miriam: Wait! But I do have a proposal that would address these concerns. At least, I hope it will. Judging from the tone of the meeting, I'm proposing we discuss this informally, not on the listserv, over the next two weeks, and hold the training, and then at the next meeting take up discussion again.

Ernest: All right. We have a proposal. Stand-asides?

Dan: Are there other possibilities?

Lesley: We'll get to that if this one doesn't pass.

Ernest: I'm not seeing any stand-asides. Any blocks?

> Dennis: Can I just ask for clarification—more detail on the proposal?
>
> [*Ernest restates the proposal*]
>
> Dennis: No. I still block.

Now, it was the turn of Dan, a young man of South Asian descent who occasionally worked with the legal team (he was, at that moment, sitting on the ground, somewhat anomalously in a three-piece suit, having just returned from acting as legal observer at a demo in Brooklyn), to try to save the day.

> Dan: Okay, well, I have an alternate proposal. Since we've already spent so much time on this issue, I'd say, rather than wait two weeks, let's have the discussion right now, and come to a final decision. Because people are definitely on edge now. The issue is still really visceral. Rather than being a reason to step back, maybe that means we *should* talk about it now.
>
> Bob: Point of process. Rebecca has just reminded us that it's not the end of the matter if *one* person blocks. So are we moving to modified consensus or aren't we?
>
> *Ernest*: Yes. It's my impression that there's a certain ambivalence in the group about the idea of modified consensus. I'm feeling a certain resistance. Maybe we should have a quick straw poll to get a sense of the room regarding DAN's use of…
>
> Rachel & Miriam: No! No!
>
> Marina: Anyway, what are we talking about here? How can you block a proposal to come back and discuss something? It's like someone said "I want to discuss labor issues next week" and then somebody blocked that.
>
> *Lesley*: So shall we have a straw poll to see if we want to move to modified consensus or not?
>
> Miriam: No! We don't have to.
>
> Brooke: You know, regarding Dan's proposal—there is a slot on the agenda set aside for education. We rarely use it, but why don't we just hold the trainings discussion there?
>
> *Ernest*: Let's go two-thirds on the original proposal before we do that one. So the proposal is: that we delay discussion, talk about this informally, then get back to it in two weeks. Any stand-asides?
>
> Marina: No! I think the point we were trying to make was that there was no need to bring this as a formal proposal in the first place. We don't need to go two-thirds. We don't need to consider it at all. There's nothing in there that should need the approval of the entire group.
>
> Cindy: I think what Marina is trying to say is that, if there's a block, you don't need to immediately revert to the tyranny of the majority. Normally, you

> either table the proposal, or you try to modify it. This is just tabling the proposal. You don't need to consense on whether to table it or not!
>
> Sara: I'm *so* confused. So… okay, we agree we don't need to vote. I'd say, don't just put the item in the Educational slot, because this conversation needs to be about more than just training a vibes watcher. It has to be about the basic dynamics of this group. But I'm at the point of asking myself: how can we vote on this if some people's consciousnesses haven't been raised enough to be able to vote on it.
>
> Many at Once: Whoa!

This was, in fact, a challenge to the very basis of consensus—hence the shocked reaction. It was also a bit of a bad sign that Sara, still somewhat new to the group, was reverting to terms like "vote." "Well, maybe I'm just not up enough on certain issues," she scowled, and then fell silent. If there had been a vibes watcher, she would almost certainly have called a time-out because the tension in the room was extraordinary. This despite the fact that no one, not even Dennis, had actually raised their voice. Instead, conflict seemed to become sublimated into the kind of peculiar legalism that one usually identifies with parliamentary maneuvering, but which normally almost never occurred in consensus-based groups.

> *Ernest*: I see five people with their hands up. I'm going to take those five and then close discussion.
>
> Jody [*a new person, punk girl, friend of Chris*]: I have an idea. How about this? Why not set apart a certain time every meeting where people can all talk about the vibes, and suggest something that can be done about it. That way we can both make sure it happens, and ensure that responsibility is broadly distributed.
>
> [*several twinkles. It's not taken up, though.*]
>
> Melissa: I'd like it if the Women's Caucus were to meet before the next DAN meeting in two weeks, and that the time and place be well publicized. Also, we should allocate extra time in the upcoming meeting to ensure no one tries to cut discussion short.
>
> Dennis: I'm saying this with the best intentions, and please, don't anyone feel slighted, but as I get older, I notice that people often accuse others of what they themselves do. I have noticed this with accusations of homophobia, which I admit is a very serious problem. I don't want to be insensitive to others' needs, but I think we need to act with more humility here.
>
> Miriam: Well I just want to state that, personally, this conversation has been *very* infuriating.

> [*Many twinkles*]
>
> *Ernest*: All right, then. We'll set aside time for a training on diversity, and bring this back as a discussion in Ongoing Business next time.
>
> Rachel: We've already coordinated all this. Lesley and I already proposed this training two weeks ago.
>
> *Ernest*: So, can we move on to the SOA proposal?
>
> Many: Yes! Yes! Please!

The SOA proposal was being brought forward by a relatively new participant named Rebecca, an affable, butchy-looking twenty-year-old who was, among other things, a union carpenter in Brooklyn. She was also (we were later to discover) an excellent facilitator. Rebecca immediately proposed a couple minute's break for stretching and recovery, a suggestion greeted by many cheers of enthusiasm. When we reconvened, she explained the background of the School of the Americas Watch protest coalition, which had been carrying out annual CDs at Fort Benning for almost a decade now. The coalition was founded by a Catholic priest and included a lot of faith-based groups, it was a bit top-down in organization and old-fashioned in their idea of nonviolence, but they were also keen to learn from us. We agreed to form a group to see how we could liaise. Next, Bob proposed a teach-in on the Prison Industrial Complex to coincide with our upcoming actions at the Republican convention. Jason from RTS asked for our help in putting together a large festive demo to publicize the situation at Charas. An ISO person encouraged us to take part in a large permitted rally planned to coincide with the first day of the Republican convention in Philly, called Unity 2000, which had been endorsed by the city's major unions. Then we passed to New Business. Mac and Lesley gave a report-back from their experiences at the recent actions in Windsor; Sara described her plans to create "Video I-Witness" teams to monitor police during the convention; and finally, Jack Griffin was allowed to address the group. Griffin, a man in his twenties in a union jacket and 1930s style worker's hat, was the national coordinator for UNITE's laundry workers' campaign. He looked demonstrably annoyed:

> Griffin: I had originally intended to bring two proposals before this group, but, because of the nature of the *fucking* discussion earlier, I'll just make one.
>
> Various DANsters: Whoa!
>
> Dan: Um, excuse my breaking in here, but this is *just* the kind of problem that we were talking about. Whenever women's issues get brought up, someone becomes indignant about the fact that we're even talking about them. And that creates a repressive atmosphere.

> Griffin: Okay, I appreciate that. Calling it a "*fucking* discussion" was inappropriate.
>
> I'm here to speak on behalf of four thousand union folks, who work for twenty-seven different companies here in the city and on Long Island. Most of them are immigrants. These are people who have to handle shit and blood all fuckin' day. [*pause, then softer*] I don't know, I'll tell you what: I'll come back here with the president of the local there, who can tell you about a series of actions we're hoping will ultimately lead to a general strike among laundry workers in November. We're working with Local 6 and Local 100 on that, and plan to hold our first action a week from tomorrow.
>
> Maybe our membership should meet with y'all, as perhaps there's a bit of a divergence in your respective experiences. I think most of the discussion I've been hearing this afternoon is very classist; I don't understand half the words you're using!
>
> [*One other union guy, Nathan from Local 1199, bursts into applause. Everyone else stays silent.*]
>
> Still, they got too much to lose if they go it alone on this. When they walk out, there won't be any more paychecks, and there sure as hell won't be any trust funds to fall back on. So they're going to need all the help that we can get.
>
> Malcolm: You said there's going to be an action a week from tomorrow?
>
> Griffin: Yeah, the target is going to be an as-yet unspecified hotel on Broadway.
>
> *Ernest*: Could you tell some of us the details later?
>
> Griffin: Yeah, yeah, we have a plan. It's going to be a direct action held in a non-union hotel. But I can't really talk about it here. I'll be back, okay?

To say that someone stomped out of a room is a cliché, but, in this case, it seemed almost literally accurate. Ernest asked, "Um, can people make sure he'll be there at the next DAN Labor meeting at ABC?"

In fact he never showed up, but at that meeting we did decide never again to bring union people directly to DAN General, but always to the labor working group instead.

After a brief presentation from Ana of the IMC about trying to enlist DAN's help with upcoming protests at the UN's Millennium Summit, we broke up for the night. On our way home, my friend Stuart remarked to me, "You know, when you actually get around to writing your ethnography, you might want to use that meeting as a case study. All DAN's major fault lines seem to have just been exposed." Certainly, it provided a beautiful example of the friction of gender concerns and social class.

A lot of the trouble galvanized around Dennis. It certainly didn't originate in him. But he became a symbol. From the perspective of most DAN members, Dennis was the very embodiment of what, in activist parlance, was called a "wingnut"—the sort of person who bases his political worldview on the belief that the Pope is controlled by space aliens, or that the Parks Department's anti-mosquito spraying campaign is really a front for CIA genetic warfare experiments. Dennis believed the US was under military occupation by several divisions of a secret UN army under the command of Mikhail Gorbachev: a classic version of the sort of "black helicopter" theories popular among the same, small-town, white, working-class circles that provide most of the recruits for right-wing militias. As Rebecca was later to observe: "There are ways where the far right and far left are surprisingly similar. And all that it takes to cross that little line that separates them is to be a total fucking lunatic."

The problem with Dennis, though, was that he just wasn't quite crazy enough. Had he been an obvious lunatic, it would have been easy to find some excuse to exclude him. But, in fact, he rarely brought up his more paranoid theories at meetings. One of the few times he did actually was after Ana's presentation about the Millennium Summit, during that very meeting, when he explained that the summit in question—a meeting of world leaders at the UN—was going to see the first announcement of a One World Religion. Dennis was, as we've seen, capable of at least paying lip service to DAN's ideals, even though he seemed profoundly confused about its organizational principles: he blocked constantly, and no one seemed capable of explaining to him why a block was not the same as a "no" vote. He had friends among the hardcore squatter community, which included several of New York's most longstanding anarchist activists. There, many respected him for his dedication, his willingness to take risks for a cause, his loyalty to his friends. Squatters were used to regular dealings with junkies and refugees from homeless shelters; by their standards, Dennis wasn't really all that outré.

In facilitation trainings, one often discusses the "wingnut problem": What to do when, in an open meeting, someone wanders in who's disruptively insane. Normally, one tries to ease such a person out. Eventually this did happen. What really outraged most of the DAN women, however (and this came out in conversations afterward) was the idea that *any* DAN men would side with such a person—in this case a mentally unstable, physically threatening, right-wing conspiracy theorist—against them. Because, certainly, some did. During the meeting, the handful of union people in the room (Nathan from UNITE, Griffin and a woman he'd come in with) would often nod or express clear approval after his statements: partly, it's clear, because they identified with his proletarian manner, mainly, I suspect, because they saw the idea of a "vibes watcher" as a means for upper-middle-class feminists to be able to shut people like that up. Granted, none of these people were anarchists or even DAN regulars.[24] But even more rankling was the apparent passive acquiescence of so many of the regular DAN men. Many women noted that while only a few men had spoken against the proposal at that meeting—and this was to continue in later ones—even fewer men spoke for it. Even the male facilitator, Ernest, seemed from the start strangely anxious to move on to the next item on the agenda.[25] The result was that Dennis came to seem the de facto spokesman for the unstated feelings of the rest of the group; in effect, something like the desublimated face of DAN masculinity—what many women suspected really lay behind the agreeable facade.

A similar pattern was to reappear in subsequent meetings, where Dennis found strong support from a couple other familiar faces from the squatter scene, and at least a certain level of tolerance from other participants. True, the tolerance did gradually dissolve as it became increasingly difficult to deny that his presence was disruptive. Some DAN men began to make efforts to talk to Dennis' friends, or to approach Dennis himself informally and try to convince him to change his behavior. They were of no avail. A couple weeks later, when Dennis blocked three proposals in a row, and indignantly refused offers to work with those making the proposal to reach some kind of compromise, Brad, who had some experience with the squatter scene and was particularly effective at dealing with wingnuts, volunteered to take him aside to defuse the situation.

"The facilitators," he explained, "suggested to me maybe we should step aside a minute—just to cool down a little. Maybe I explain to you some things about the process we're using."

"What? Step outside?" demanded Dennis. "You want to step outside? Yeah. Okay. Let's step outside!"

At this point, pretty much everyone had to agree there was a problem, and the backstage conversations turned to how to convince him to stop coming to general meetings entirely. Eventually, they bore fruit.

Still, the damage had been done. Dennis had managed to put a very ugly face on a tacit male opposition to women's concerns that, certainly, went well beyond him. Backstage talk among the men was decidedly ambivalent. Sam, for example, was going around saying he was going to quit the group if they created a vibes watcher because "it was a form of fascist mind control." ("Yes," Eric Laursen replied, bemusedly. "It's a little-known fact that all SS units were equipped with vibes watchers.") Some men were developing a satirical version of the proposal involving a giant hook and gong. Some members of the Labor group suggested part of the difficulty might lie with the language. "Maybe the problem," one suggested, "is the New Agey, California tone of 'vibes watcher.' If we could come up with some new term with more of a gritty, dirty, New York sort of sensibility...." This was taken to heart, at least to the extent of changing the name from "vibes-watcher" to "third facilitator." By the next meeting, while matters were still heated and contentious, and there were actually several middle-aged guys tied to the squatter scene backing Dennis up, many of the men were obliged to weigh in and began to publicly speak for the proposal. There was a raft of friendly amendments: limits on the third facilitator's power, a trial period, formal written guidelines, and so forth. There was a recommendation that each meeting be followed by a general review of process, tone, and gender dynamics. There was a recommendation that DAN men create some kind of men's group to examine their own sexism—or at least, conduct an anti-sexist training. Finally, it came down to impassioned speeches. Several of the hardcore wingnut faction made dramatic threats to leave the group (it was not clear, at this point, that everyone felt this would be such a bad thing). They argued that other men would follow. Others, including myself, argued that the meeting demographics showed many women had left the group already, if with less posturing and fanfare. If even this attempt to address women's concerns were rebuffed, we could expect far more would. If we had to lose someone, perhaps it would be better to lose some from the other side, if only for reasons of balance.

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[24] Most in fact seemed to come as members or allies of the ISO.

[25] Though things got even more complicated when the topic of modified consensus came up, since Lesley actually was suspicious of it, as we've seen, and Ernest didn't have a problem with the idea.

The measure was finally consensed on, and DAN got a third facilitator. Once the role was created, it proved completely unremarkable. As far as I know, that third facilitator never did call a time-out on any individual and was never accused of censorship. But such fault lines, once exposed, are hard to cover up.

INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

Consensus operates on a principle of trust. By giving every member the power to block, one is giving them the power to throw the group into a crisis at any point. The idea is to ensure that everyone is conscious of the trust the group has placed in them, to use the power responsibly, and this is, indeed, what does tend to happen. The reason racism, sexism, and other forms of what activists like to call "internalized forms of oppression" are so difficult to deal with is precisely because one is not conscious of them. They are simultaneously absolute evils, and so fundamental to the nature of our society that they form inescapable aspects of the subjectivity of anyone who grew up within it. They cannot be defeated just by trust in others' good intentions.

Let's put this another way. Back in the 1880s, Peter Kropotkin (1927:135–36) responded to claims that anarchism was utopian by arguing that matters were really the other way around. What was naïve and utopian was to believe that one could give anyone arbitrary power over others and trust them to exercise it responsibly. Certainly, it's been my own experience that the only times the classic anarchist gesture—to entrust social actors with such power that, if they acted irresponsibly, they could do enormous damage, and then expect them to fully consider the effects of their actions for that very reason—regularly fails is when those powers are unequally distributed. A hierarchical system of organization, after all, is also based on granting enormous power to those in authority, on the assumption that the mere knowledge that they have power over others' lives will be enough to inspire them to act responsibly. This is precisely the sort of system to which anarchists object. It's clear that on occasion, granting someone such power, even in a hierarchical system, does have the same effect. There are judges and politicians who always remain keenly aware of the weight of responsibility their offices entail. But these tend to be remarkable individuals. For the most part, holders of high office, whatever their rhetoric, quickly stop seeing their power as a gift or burden demanding constant reflection, but instead come to assume it as part of the fabric of their being. This is, of course, what is always the case with the kinds of power that come from white, or male, privilege—forms of power that are never formally granted at all, and whose essence is precisely that their holders never have to think about them. Even for dedicated activists, it requires extensive work—frequent trainings, consciousness-raising techniques, daily reminders by friends and facilitators—to ensure they remain conscious of having this power to begin with. This is the one area where others simply cannot be given the benefit of the doubt: which is precisely why so many male activists saw the institution of a vibes watcher (at least as proposed) as an assault on the very principle of consensus. In a way, it was. But its exponents certainly saw it as a way of patrolling the borders, as it were, to allow for the possibility of trust within the circle.

There are other techniques for getting around this problem, even if none are entirely reliable. One is to encourage constant introspection. Hence, the insistence in the meeting that we should all be doing vibes work all the time. The danger of dealing with deeply internalized forms of privilege is that one can fall into endless psychologism—"touchy-feely race discourse," some activists would call it—that everything becomes profoundly personalized. In the absence of any authoritative, overarching ideology, one ends up with a kind of endless encounter group of personal narratives and subjectivities. To avoid this, some anarchists insisted on constantly bringing matters back to practical, action terms. Some, for example, preferred not to use the terms "racism" or "sexism" at all. Rather than trying to combat abstractions like racism, they reframed the problem as one of "white supremacy," as an immediate practical problem: how do we ensure that white people don't dominate this group? Like male dominance, white supremacy was not an ideology that comes to shape consciousness, but an outcome. The assumption is that by working in groups that do not operate on principles of white supremacy, racism itself can be unlearned. This seems the solution most in keeping with the overall principles of the movement, but it does sometimes seem to present one with the problem of the chicken and the egg.

FINAL NOTE: ENGAGING WITH HIERARCHICAL GROUPS

To sum up then: most American anarchists, and most of those involved in the direct action movement, feel that some version of consensus decision-making is the only form entirely consistent with a society free of systematic physical coercion. There are a lot of reasons to believe they are right. Very few Americans who are not anarchists, or involved in direct action, have much experience with consensus, or with participatory decision-making of any sort. As a result, everything has to be learned; new customs, habits, and attitudes invented. The history of DAN, for example, can be seen either as an abortive effort to create a continental network of activists, or as an extraordinarily successful effort to disseminate this new democratic culture—at least within activist circles.

The experience of individuals who enter this world is usually both one of exhilaration at social possibilities previously unimagined, and intense frustrations over some of the dilemmas described in the last section. In the end, though, the most challenging problem facing autonomous groups experimenting with direct democracy is not even how to combat internalized forms of hierarchy, but how to create ongoing ties with groups that are not organized along autonomous, or directly democratic, lines. Let me say a few words about this problem here, before passing to the next chapter, on actions.

As I've observed, consensus decision-making requires extreme generosity of spirit in dealing with those one considers within the democratic circle. One corollary, it appears, is the complete rejection of any prospect of constructive engagement with those who are clearly outside that circle. Hence, the second item in the CDAN principles of unity (adopted directly from the PGA hallmarks): "A confrontational attitude toward undemocratic institutions including governments and corporations in which capital is the only real policy maker." Unlike their reformist allies—whether NGOs, labor unions, or political parties—direct actionists had no intention of entering into a conversation with the leadership of the WTO, the IMF, World Bank, or, for that matter, the US government. They did not wish to see those institutions reformed. They wished to see them abolished. Often, they referred to them, in meetings or activist literature, as "evil"—a term that, tossed about as often as it was, might well give outsiders the impression they are dealing with simple-minded fanatics. But it's interesting to consider the deployment of this term. It was very specific. In my own experience the word "evil" was never applied to individuals. It is only applied to organizations. What's "evil" are not those who work for, or even run organizations like the IMF, but the larger institutional structure in which they operate—whether because "capital is the only real policy maker," or because such organizations are enmeshed in hierarchical chains of command, or probably both—a structure which makes it impossible for such people to act with honesty or human decency. Therefore, the only appropriate moral response is to shut that organizational structure down.[26]

This is straightforward enough. The real problem is how to deal with the reformist allies—those who *are* willing to engage with structures of power. Alliances with liberals, as anarchists call them, were always fraught. Tensions were usually ostensibly over disagreements about tactics, the inevitable question of "violence." Here, there was often a kind of uncomfortable alliance: NGOs disliked anarchist tactics, but also recognized it was very useful to have militant radicals around besides whom they seemed reasonable, if they were, in fact, seeking a place at the table. Anarchists disliked liberal reformism, but found it useful to have someone in the mainstream to raise a fuss if the government turned to obviously illegal forms of repression. Nonetheless, over time, it became clear that the real divide was organizational: and that, in fact, even the most pacifist members of direct action groups felt they had more in common with Black Bloc anarchists than with the most radical NGOs.

Sometimes it took a shocking act of violence—between activists—to make this clear. In Washington DC, for instance the Mobilization for Global Justice, an anti-corporate, NGO-heavy coalition that, in theory, worked on democratic consensus principles, ended up splitting over a case of sexual assault. I wasn't personally involved in the DC scene at the time and only got second- or thirdhand reports, but the common story was this. The victim (another activist) ended up in the hospital, and while anarchists in the group were reluctant to turn even a rapist over to the police, they certainly felt radical intervention of some sort was required, and were outraged that so many fellow activists were hesitant to do anything to, or even say anything about, a man who (owing to his organizational position) controlled all sorts of money and resources. In the resulting blow-up, most of the autonomous activists ended up quitting and joining an alternative coalition called the Anti-Capitalist Convergence (ACC)—one that many had previously seen as the DC Black Bloc.

That was an extreme case. But, almost always, the points of fracture were around similar issues of trust, about what could and could not be talked about, and how that was affected by institutional affiliation. In New York, DAN Labor ultimately collapsed when professional union organizers started attending meetings; Police and Prisons soon after, over racial issues, but exacerbated by the radical organizational differences between DAN activists and those they were trying to support. The final blow to all such alliances of course came with September 11, after which almost all labor unions refused to be associated with anything that could possibly be dubbed unpatriotic. Most NGOs, terrified for their funding base, pulled back as well. The split emerged most clearly during the protests against the World Economic Forum in New York in February 2002, when a number of radical NGOs tried to reestablish relations. From the start, political cultures began colliding. The NGO official most determined to throw his support behind the movement kicked off his involvement with an appearance at an activist conference where he first enthusiastically reassured local radicals (off the record) that there was "exactly the right amount of property destruction" in Seattle; then almost immediately took to the podium and delivered a public talk which included a blanket condemnation of all forms of property destruction. Rather than reassuring anyone, he ended up becoming the perfect embodiment of the kind of behavior whose basis direct democracy is meant to destroy. Liaison committees were set up, the NGO people made all sorts of promises, then mostly disappeared. In the end, they announced they could do nothing in the absence of a "peace pledge," to be undertaken by everyone taking part in the protests, swearing that there would be no violence or destruction of any kind. This latter was so obviously outrageous, from the perspective of members of NYC DAN, let alone the newly founded New York ACC, that it never even occurred to anyone from either group to actually present the proposal at a meeting. No further discussion was possible. And this despite the fact that no one had seriously considered trashing an obviously traumatized city and every member of either group who had made a public statement had said so.

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[26] Hence occasional debates, in DAN, about whether, say, the Organization of American States, or United Nations, were "evil" in the same sense. Debaters only occasionally used that actual word. But the key question was: Was it possible to see them as a check on some other, more egregious, form of power, and hence to engage with them constructively, or were they too inherently corrupt?

We are back to the problem of moral transparency, discussed earlier. If nothing else, the clash of moral standards and expectations is such that any alliance that crosses the line between autonomous organizing, and those in ongoing engagement with the government and mainstream political culture is likely to be brittle and unstable. Yet, at the same time, they are often necessary, and certainly advantageous to both parties. The result seems to be an endless cycle of comings together and breakings apart.

CHAPTER 8

ACTIONS

> A society which denies us every adventure makes its own dissolution the only possible adventure.
>
> —Reclaim the Streets, London

The main purpose of meetings are to plan events referred to as "actions." This is presumably short for "direct actions," but in common usage the term is used to refer to pretty much any collective undertaking that is both political in intent and carried out in the knowledge that it might be met with hostile intervention on the part of the police. In other words, while meetings are meant to be a free space of mutual respect and solidarity, a liberated territory of sorts, actions are where that space comes up against—or at least, is in danger of coming up against—its opposite: where activists who see existing structures of authority as illegitimate come face to face with representatives of that authority, who see their actions, in turn, as illegal.

As a result the term "action" can be used for undertakings varying wildly in both scale and militancy: for anything from leafleting in front of a supermarket to shutting down a global summit. This, in turn, makes it very difficult to generalize about them. Nonetheless, I will try, in this chapter, to work out at least a very rough typology of what sorts of action might be said to exist, of their different principles, purposes, and implications.

I am not the first to try to do this. Activists sometimes work out rough-and-ready typologies of their own. Most of these, however, focus less on the structure of the action than on the intended goal. In one recent essay, media activist Patrick Reinsborough distinguishes between five types of direct action:

1) Direct Action at the point of production (e.g., strikes)
2) Direct Action at the point of destruction (e.g., blockading bulldozers to

save forests or squats)

3) Direct Action at the point of consumption (e.g., consumer boycotts)

4) Direct Action at the point of decision (e.g., trying to shut down the WTO meetings in Seattle)

5) Direct Action at the point of assumption (e.g., culture-jamming) (Reinsborough 2004: 183–85)

While an effective campaign, Reinsborough argues, will usually involve a combination of several different kinds of action, actions at the point of assumption are ultimately the most important—or at least, the most profound—since they take aim at the basic frameworks in which acts are interpreted. They attempt to change the terms of argument, or at least make an issue of what it is one is arguing about.

There are obvious reasons why activists, when they write about actions in the abstract, tend to take this kind of strategic perspective. Most of the existing literature is concerned with exactly these sort of questions: with how actions fit into larger campaigns, with their ultimate effects more than with their internal structure. Tactical matters are left to manuals, training material, and how-to books: of which there's quite a voluminous literature (e.g., Ruckus Society 1997a, 1997b, 1997c). Voluminous, but not especially systematic. Probably the best and most comprehensive recent action manual of this sort is the CrimethInc Collective's *Recipes for Disaster* (2005), intended as a practical guide to direct action in all its manifestations. The chapters are organized alphabetically:

Affinity Groups
Antifascist Action
Asphalt Mosaics
Banner Drops and Banner Hoists
Behavioral Cut-ups
Bicycle Collectives
Bicycle Parades
Painting by Bicycle
How to Make a Bicycle into a Record Player
Billboard Improvement
Blocs, Black and Otherwise
Blockades and Lockdowns
Classroom Takeover
Coalition Building
Collectives
Corporate Downsizing

Distribution, Tabling, and Infoshops
Dumpster Diving…

and so forth.[1] The resulting compendium is extremely useful for anyone looking for pointers on how to hop a freight train or deposit a pie in the face of a public official. But, as a taxonomy, it leaves a bit to be desired. As an ethnographer, I'm interested in teasing out the tacit, underlying structure of assumptions, trying to get some sense of what sorts of action exist on the basis of their own internal logic: as forms of action which are in a sense performances, in a sense rituals, but at the same time nothing if not immediately efficacious in the world. In order to be able to think about actions, one does need, I think, to begin with a more formal typology.

PART I: SOME EXAMPLES OF PARTICULAR STYLES OF ACTION

Any attempt to create a list of elementary forms or units of action, though—the banner-drop, the rally, the sit-in, the snake-march, the lockdown, and so on—runs into immediate problems. Some forms always end up encompassing or being on entirely different scales than others (others overlap). So, instead of trying to be comprehensive, I've decided to limit myself to public actions that bring together a fairly large number of participants (this is partly just to ensure I am dealing with more or less commensurable objects) and then trying to understand the structure of each type of action in terms of what the actors are trying to achieve. This in turn will mean establishing my typology basically as different ways of configuring the relations of four elements: those carrying out the action, the object or target of their actions, the audience (real or imagined), and the police. This will make it possible to demonstrate that many of the classic forms of action are, in a certain sense, variations, even inversions, of each other—different ways of rearranging the same basic elements.

I will start with a few words on (1) protest marches and rallies, which in most cases are not technically direct actions at all, then proceed from there to consider (2) picket lines, (3) street parties, (4) classic civil disobedience (blockades and lockdowns), and finally (5) Black Bloc actions. Each section will be organized around one first-person account, drawn from my own field notes. As a result, most will end up overflowing their frame to a certain degree, as real-life accounts tend to do—but I like to think that, in doing so, they will actually be more useful than they would be if tailored and edited to make just a single point. The chapter will end with some observations on relations with the state: on the experience of arrest, and on the tacit rules of engagement that regulate relations between activists and police.

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[1] Similar, in the Ruckus Society series of action training pamphlets, the topics covered are climbing, scouting, action planning, media, knots, and making videos.

FIRST EXAMPLE: PROTEST (MARCHES AND RALLIES)

Marches and rallies are all about numbers. Their ostensible aim is to put as many people as possible in the streets. As we saw in Part I, most anarchists see this imperative as somewhat pointless, "marching along with signs"—in fact, most see it as the very opposite of direct action, and define their own forms of action in opposition to classic marches, in much the way they define their own internal organization in opposition to those favored by Marxist or liberal groups that organize them. The reasons are not far to seek. Anarchists tend to favor militant tactics, but they reject anything that smacks of military-style discipline. Conventional protests are strictly nonviolent, but they are almost invariably organized in top-down, military fashion, with squadrons of official "marshals" to keep order and shepherd along otherwise often completely unorganized masses of protesters. Nothing could be further from anarchist ideals of self-organization. Alternately, when groups are organized, their internal organization is often itself explicitly hierarchical, with different groups dressed in identical hats or T-shirts, carrying printed signs, with a leader with megaphone calling out the chants. Often, larger marches become much like a St. Patrick's Day or Labor Day parade, with a succession of distinct groups or blocs following one another, often in identical uniforms, replete with floats, bands, formations, sound-truck, etc.

The massing and rallying of forces, of course, evokes something of the image of an army, but, normally, armies march and rally to bring themselves to a place of combat. Protesters march and rally to make a sheer display of their own numbers, and then, usually end up standing in some large public space, listening to inspirational speakers, perhaps including analyses of the political situation and suggestions on other ways they can take action. Alternately, when the march is over, they might simply go home.

The emphasis on turning out numbers also means that marches and rallies—even the most radical—are typically legal, permitted events, and this, in turn, has a number of repercussions. Most obviously, it means that organizers will want to ensure that everyone taking part in a march or rally—or anyone in the vicinity of one, for that matter—obeys the law. Almost invariably, this means they look with extreme disfavor on anyone who might be practicing more militant tactics anywhere nearby.

My purpose here is not just to register a litany of typical anarchist complaints. Some anarchists will argue that marches and rallies have never, by themselves, brought about any significant social change. This is clearly unfair. It may well be true in a literal sense: marches and rallies are only effective in this way when they are one element of much broader campaigns employing a wide range of tactics. But, as such, they can play an essential, perhaps even a necessary, role. The march on Washington of 1963 and the rally at the Lincoln Memorial, where Martin Luther King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech might have been the culmination of years of struggle, involving boycotts, sit-ins, and every sort of civil disobedience and direct action. Nonetheless, it was that march and rally that stuck in the popular imagination, to effectively become a part of American mythology. This was what really brought home that something epochal had happened. The anarchist might object that this is precisely what is problematic about such events: they mark the moment where years of autonomous organizing by local activists are essentially appropriated into the personality of one or another charismatic leader. This is a legitimate complaint. But one could also argue that, to effect certain sorts of social change, this is probably inevitable.

It might help here to look at the history. It's significant, I think, that in the United States, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly (the rights, taken in their most literal sense, to march and rally) were established as fundamental rights at the precise moment that the United States also adopted a representative form of government—the moment, that is, that it rejected what was at the time referred to as "democracy," in the sense of an Athenian-style system in which communities governed themselves via popular assemblies. In other words, public speech and assembly became inalienable rights at the moment they were definitively rejected as the means of actual political decision-making. Instead, they were imagined primarily as a means to "petition the government for the redress of grievances"—that is, as a form of protest.[2] While marches and rallies had long been part of the repertoire of the labor movement (Davis 1985), they developed their characteristic form in the new republic mainly in the context of electoral politics, particularly with the widening of the franchise and Jacksonian populism of the 1830s and 1840s. Almost every community came to support party-based clubs and "marching companies," and elections were marked by mass mobilizations involving rallies, hustings, pageants and torch-lit parades (Baker 1984; McGerr 1987, 1990.) This remained true throughout much of the nineteenth century and, to some extent American political parties still make use of marches and rallies, though in contemporary, mediatized campaigns, they play an increasingly minor role.

The decades after the Civil War, though, saw a powerful reaction, on the part of the educated classes, against this sort of popular mobilization. Significantly, this was also the period that saw the rise of corporate capitalism, and the birth of the modern American police. It was during the 1870s, for instance, that most American cities came to insist that citizens were no longer allowed to hold public speeches or assemblies without first applying for permits—restrictions that, since they directly contradicted the language of the First Amendment, were subject to considerable debate, and only finally approved by the Supreme Court in 1897 (Baker 1983). It was through such laws that protests by those most directly opposing the rise of corporate capitalism—for instance, radical labor groups like the IWW—could be systematically suppressed (Dubofsky 1969; Preston 1994). As a result, permitted marches and rallies became a sort of domain of para-politics—essentially, lobbying techniques—ways of making a public appeal to elected officials outside the formal mechanisms of the elections themselves. The history of marches on Washington, recently illuminated by Lucy Barber (2002), gives some sense of what started happening. When, during the depression of 1894, Jacob Coxey decided to organize a march of unemployed workers to the capital with a proposal for public works projects, the idea was widely considered unprecedented and outrageous. The legitimacy of marching on the capital only began to be accepted with the suffragette march in 1913; subsequently, Herbert Hoover's use of federal troops to disperse the veteran Bonus Marchers in 1932 played a large part in ensuring his political demise. By the 1970s, the nation's capital had become the scene of almost daily demonstrations of one sort or another, as it remains to this day. Since the vast majority of these protests receive little or no media attention, it's hard to see them—or their equivalents in state capitals and other cities—as in themselves attempts to exert pressure on elected officials. But they almost invariably tend to form part of broader, integrated campaigns that aim to do precisely that.

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[2] Some parts of the country such as New England had long known decision-making in town councils; during some—most notably Pennsylvania—there had been an efflorescence of directly democratic forms in the immediate wake of the revolution. The Federalists were explicitly rejecting this model, and of course the very idea of "democracy" in general. It was only in the early nineteenth century that the term came into common use as anything but a term of abuse (Graeber 2007).

One Rally

Let me single out one rally held in 2001 on Water Street in the financial district, in the far south of Manhattan, in front of the offices of WBAI, a radical radio station, right after what was called in activist circles the "Christmas coup." At that time, a coterie of conservative board members determined to change its political tenor had seized control of its administration and fired many of its most prominent producers and personalities. The rally marked one of the early moments in a two-year campaign that ended up employing a wide variety of tactics, from direct action to boycotts, and that was, after two years, entirely successful in returning the station to its earlier radical status quo.

I chose this example largely because I sat in on the planning meeting, which I had never before done for a permitted event. It was held at the New York IMC, and was an odd collection of 1960s veterans, with a smattering of younger activists, mostly DAN people. While everyone was using consensus process and trying to give at least lip-service to newer forms of organizing, it was clear that the political instincts of most participants were forged in a very different time.

We started by coming up with the basic parameters. We would hold a relatively small rally the next week, in order to build energy for a much larger march and rally later in the month. The discussion was mostly about time. When planning one, you come to realize a rally is a bit like a variety show. You are dealing with a series of pretty limited time slots—unless it's a momentous event, you have to assume that people will start leaving after an hour or so—so you have to budget time very carefully. You need at least one MC, possibly more, various speakers, but also entertainment and musical acts to break things up. Time gets parceled into very small segments—often just a minute or two—and then has to be allocated carefully so as to make sure all possible constituencies are represented: speaker X is funny, but do we want yet another white male? Speaker Y is the only Filipina on the program and she's poetic and inspiring, but there's no way we can keep her to just three minutes. She always goes over time. And so forth.

At the event itself, I volunteered to be one of the marshals, another thing I had never done before. My notes from the event contain a long reflection on the significance of protest pens:

Save WBAI Rally, Lower Manhattan
Field notes, January 12th, 2002

I arrived early, just as people had finished setting up the podium. Police were trundling out their wooden barricades and constructing pens, and our people were testing the mikes and amplification. I had volunteered to be one of the marshals, receiving a red armband at a brief pow-wow for marshals at a coffee shop a couple blocks away.

It is standard police procedure at any rally in New York to erect protest pens—"pig-pens" they're often called—out of wood or steel barricades, with only one or two openings, and then to expect protesters to confine themselves inside. The ostensible reason is to ensure protesters don't block the flow of pedestrians or traffic, but, in fact, pens are set up even in large public squares where there is no traffic. The effect on protesters is profoundly demoralizing, since it ensures they feel trapped and imprisoned, as well as making it very difficult for them to mix or communicate with passersby, let alone for ordinary citizens to fall in with or join them. Most activists assume this is their actual purpose.

This is not a technique employed in most American cities and the legalities are unclear. There are many, in fact, who suspect that the NYPD is aware that they really have no legal right to confine protesters in this way and that the practice would never withstand a court challenge, citing as evidence the fact the police never explicitly order people to stand inside them (they usually begin with such phrases as "We would really appreciate it if you stayed inside the pens," only afterwards employing phrases like "you'll have to get back in the pen—you're blocking traffic") and that no one is aware of anyone who has ever been arrested for refusing to stay inside. Nonetheless, police will almost invariably attempt to turn marshals for any stationary demonstration into their agents in this respect.

The rally was a classic, old-fashioned event with a sound system and speakers. There were a couple of musicians and other entertainment (after long discussions, the DAN folk had managed to get an interlude with the Radical Cheerleaders on the program), marshals and a handful of legal observers from the National Lawyer's Guild. Someone had brought along a huge box full of costumes they'd found at Charas: a series of Native American masks saved from the recent Peltier march, and we toyed with the idea of having the marshals wear wolf masks (really more like hats) and the legal observers eagles, but few were willing to play along. When we first arrived, a white-shirt (commanding officer) from the local precinct was there, chatting with the organizers in a very friendly fashion. He supported the WBAI campaign, he said, since he saw it as an extension of the labor movement. He was just there to assure everything proceeded in an orderly fashion and that no citizen was inconvenienced. After the crowd started swelling (it eventually reached several hundred) he left. Several policemen were placed near the entry to WBAI to prevent people from entering, and a few other cops were scattered around.

I didn't pay a lot of attention to the speakers, since I was putting most of my energy into patrolling the perimeter and chatting with the other marshals—almost all DAN people—about logistics and possible problems. I was also, increasingly, avoiding the police. I discovered quickly that, if you are identifiable as a marshal, two things immediately started to happen. First, you found that the pen rule did not apply to you. You could walk wherever you liked, and the cops would never bother you. Second, the cops would treat you as if your task was to make sure no one else left the pens. That this was my job, for them, was self-evident—at one point, a policeman indignantly approached me and snapped, "Hey, you're not doing your job! Look at all these people on the street!" I just shrugged and turned away, but the pressure was fairly constant, and most of the other marshals did, however reluctantly, start reminding people that the cops expected them to be inside the barricades.

This is a fairly innocuous example, but it provides a window on a crucial dynamic. The moment one has made a commitment to abide by the rule of law, and seeks a permit, one is drawn into the web of hierarchical authority: granted small forms of immunity from arbitrary rules that one is then expected to help enforce on others. My notes continue:

> For most of the DAN people, the rally seemed a little silly: after all, the speakers were almost all people we'd heard on the radio a hundred times before. Granted, it was interesting to stand, physically, among one's fellow listeners, to see what all those invisible people in the radio audience actually look like. Still, we didn't spend a lot of energy listening to the speakers.
>
> The one part we'd been waiting for was the Radical Cheerleaders—our people—but that turned out to be a great disappointment. They'd been added as a bow to new styles of activism—and they'd composed a new cheer for the occasion, but, as it turned out one could hardly see them on the stage, so most of the audience didn't really catch the silly wit of the costumes—a punk/anarchist send-up of a high school cheerleading squad replete with red and black pom-poms—and the entire set-up was based on the assumption of a single speaker, so there was no real way for a line of eight people to be heard through the microphones. Anyway the act wasn't intended for the stage, it was meant to be performed in the middle of a crowd. They tried getting rid of the microphones entirely, but then people could hardly hear them…

causing me to reflect, once again, on the implicit hierarchy that keeps creeping into such events, and the degree to which most of the anarchist forms that I'd been taking for granted were designed quite self-consciously to undercut them.

The big question about marches and rallies is always one of audience. On a superficial level, one might say, the idea is to impress with numbers. But who is one trying to impress? Presumably, one target is the powerful, particularly the politicians who, it is hoped, will respond to a sense that some of their constituents are so passionate on a particular issue that it might affect their vote. Most elected officials in America do use a system for tabulating these things: a name on a petition is assumed to represent twenty constituents, a form letter fifty, a personal letter two-hundred, and so on. In a broader sense, perhaps, one is appealing to the "public," which, in America, at least in this context, means media audiences, who can be galvanized by knowing so many people feel so passionately about a certain issue, or who, before they saw the rally, might not have been aware that the issue even existed. But, in another sense, as organizers will often be the first to admit, the audience is actually the protesters themselves, who—especially if they are not longtime veterans—almost invariably go home renewed and inspired by the mere experience of being among so many people who agree with them, full of new ideas, information, literature, friends, and personal contacts, and renewed in their commitment to political mobilization in all its forms. To be able to experience an imagined community of radio listeners, or web page readers, or any such virtual community made flesh is invariably a powerful experience.[3]

The Grammar of Slogans

The ambiguities between these three audiences seem absolutely essential here. Consider for example the somewhat odd grammar normally employed by protest slogans, a kind of unspecified imperative: "Free Mumia!," "Save the Whales!," or "Stop This Racist War!" Who exactly is being addressed here? The obvious answer is "those in power": in the US, the president, judicial system, Congress, perhaps the ruling class more generally. But the grammatical ambiguity reflects something of the ambivalence of the very notion of protest, which, in calling on the authorities to change their behavior, is, in effect, recognizing their authority—an authority that many, if not most, of the protesters actually would prefer to see as inherently illegitimate. One does not really want George Bush to save the whales. Certainly one would not want him to be able to take credit for it. Perhaps one wishes to have forced George Bush to save the whales. Really, one would rather George Bush did not exist at all. Rather, the imperative seems to work on the same three levels simultaneously: one is calling on the authorities, one is calling on the audience to join in the struggle, one is calling on one's fellow marchers to redouble their efforts; or, perhaps better put, one is evoking a single broad current of action that proceeds from the dedication of the marchers, through the transformed or reinvigorated consciousness of the public, to the reluctant concessions of the powerful. One evokes this current of action in order to bring it into being.

There are some chants where the imperative seems clearly directed at the authorities. But even here, there are almost always levels of ambiguity. There is a whole repertoire of chants and slogans, for instance, used to shame the police, especially when police are suppressing nonviolent protests. These range from the '60s favorite "The Whole World Is Watching" (often pronounced with bitter irony by those who know it isn't really true), to more contemporary and explicitly ironic choruses of "Go Fight Crime! Go Fight Crime!" When a fellow protester is being arrested, others will almost always rally around the arresting officers and chant "Let them go! Let them go!" The latter is certainly, on the face of it, a demand directed at specific, identifiable authorities. The police officers who have just seized their comrade are being asked to unlock the handcuffs and set him free. It might also seem a purely expressive one—I am aware of only one occasion when a group of police officers (isolated, surrounded, and wildly outnumbered) actually complied with such a demand. Normally, everyone knows perfectly well that chanting will not force the police to let an arrestee go. In most cases, the chanting is directed as much towards the arrestees, to express solidarity, to show them they are not alone. This is all the more true when these chants continue during "jail solidarity" actions, when a group of supporters positions themselves across the street from a precinct or jailhouse and chant continually for hours. At this point, there is obviously no question of the police responding—in fact, matters are by now almost certainly out of the hands of anyone within earshot—but chanters are always well aware that raising a deafening racket inside the police station tends to be extraordinarily gratifying for those in detention, and is found incredibly annoying by police.

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[3] This was brought home to me for example in the days immediately after September 11, 2001, when activists—first in New York, then nationally—rather than abandoning marches and protests already planned, in fact immediately drew together to plan news ones. The ACC in Washington had been planning a very militant action against the IMF for a few weeks later, and while the detailed plans were called off, organizers defiantly rejected pleas to also cancel an illegal protest march—despite the certainty of no media coverage and extreme police repression. Many were quite explicit that, if one were, say, an anarchist punk in Cincinnati, this must be an extremely trying and alienating time, and it was the responsibility of the larger community to reassure them they were not alone.

Coda: Marches that Become Direct Action

Without a permit, a march becomes direct action again: it becomes a matter of occupying public space in defiance of the law. Even with a permit, it can often take on many of the qualities of a direct action if the police attitude is hostile.

In the immediate wake of the September 11 attacks on New York, for example, organizers of the World Economic Forum—a junket of world leaders normally held in Davos, Switzerland—announced they were going to change venues that year to Manhattan, "in solidarity" with the city. It was quite a clever move, since they had been facing increasingly effective opposition in Davos, and now would be in a city where the police (the NYPD were then being widely lionized in the media as heroes of 911) would be at a maximum advantage. Almost all the unions and NGOs that normally helped organize such protests bowed out, so local anarchist groups—including DAN—were forced to organize everything, including the permitted march, themselves. Aside from the usual problems anarchists have when trying to operate legally—such as having to pretend to have a hierarchical organization (every permitted parade for example must have a Grand Marshal)—organizers discovered there was almost no difference between organizing a legal or illegal action when police feel they have total impunity. After long negotiations, police commanders agreed on a march route a week before the event; they then arbitrarily changed the route when the event started. The march was held up for an hour before it even started; during that time, police attacked, pepper-sprayed, and arrested a dozen people for carrying shields. There were detectives filming everyone at every point, and endless riot cops, motorcycles, and mounted police stopping the march randomly to break it up, or making groups wait for arbitrary periods of time hoping they would give up and trickle away. During the march itself, snatch squads would randomly grab individual marchers or try to start larger incidents. As a result, the entire march had to be organized like an action. Everyone was organized into affinity groups, marchers often had to link arms, there were scouts, communications people on bicycles, and so on.

The aggressive police tactics were not simply the result of hostility—though most of us felt there was an element of that—but part of a common strategy to keep numbers low. Marches are, as I've mentioned, always a numbers game. Police are also aware that newspapers generally do not calculate the total number of marchers that have been on the streets over the course of a day but only those on the street at any one given moment.[4] What's more, if the papers are uncharitable—as they were during the WEF—they count not the number that sets out at the beginning of a march, but the number that makes it to the end. A march that began with at least ten thousand was thus made to run a gauntlet that reduced them to something like three by the time they reached the Waldorf (where the meetings were being held), whereupon the *New York Times* and wire services could dutifully report that three thousand people held a protest in front of the hotel.

Often, with unpermitted events, there is a kind of calculation of forces on either side. Experienced activists quickly develop a sense for numbers. In order to conduct a mass arrest, for example, police will normally have to outnumber arrestees three-to-one—even more, in fact, if their targets use defensive tactics like linking arms. On several occasions I've ended up in the role of scout, monitoring the number of police massed ahead, counting vehicles and armor, the number of arrest buses deployed and so forth, so as to calculate the odds of a mass arrest and call back the information to organizers. Helicopters hovering over the city are presumably monitoring protester numbers for the other side. Usually, though, there are more than mere numbers at play. On July 31, 2000, during the Republican convention protests in Philadelphia, the Kensington Welfare Rights Union organized an unpermitted march of thousands of poor citizens, defying police vows to arrest everyone involved. The entire event turned into a prolonged game of maneuver. Organizers first placed mothers with children at the head of the march, so as to make it as difficult as possible for the police to attack them. Police responded by announcing that, since mothers were endangering their children by placing them in harm's way (presumably, by exposing them to the danger of attack by the police), any mother arrested with a child would be in danger of losing custody. This caused most of the mothers to retreat, but they were promptly replaced by elderly and handicapped protesters in wheelchairs. Police did not interfere as the march began, but halfway up the march route, scouts discovered several hundred riot cops in vans and maybe thirty arrest buses. Rumors were flying in all directions, and at one point, word went out from someone monitoring police radio that an order had been issued to begin arrests. but the sheer number of marchers—at least ten thousand—would have made even an effort to cut off and detain the lead marchers almost impossible. In the end, all the marchers got through.

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[4] The former number always more than are on the streets at any given time, since, for marches of any size, some marchers are already done and going home while others are still waiting to start.

The presence of large numbers in such situations is critical, and usually radically limits what the police can do. During the protests surrounding Bush's inauguration (J20), six months later, DC police cut off and were in the process of carrying out a mass arrest on perhaps two hundred marchers who had been part of the Black Bloc—the only group that had come determined to engage in direct action. The group was surrounded by riot police at a major intersection; reinforcements were being brought up, a second police line constructed to make it impossible for other activists to mass in support. Arrest buses were appearing and the chief of police had already arrived to supervise. Those in the circle quickly organized themselves defensively, linking arms and forming a circle, but the situation was looking bleak (I had myself escaped through an alleyway with some of the Radical Cheerleaders and was trying to bring in support), when several thousand marchers suddenly appeared on the scene with signs and banners. It turns out they were what we referred to at the time as "angry Democrats," a mass of individuals organized by Moveon.com that were proceeding on a permitted march route towards the inaugural parade route.

Still, as soon as they arrived, the tactical situation transformed completely. The march leaders were ordered to detour. They refused. A mass of three thousand was now weighing against thin exterior police lines; Black Bloc'ers were emerging from the alleyways to instruct the marchers on how to link arms and slowly advance against barricades or lines of police. Finally, the police called off the entire project and, after two or three symbolic arrests, retreated. On that occasion, the common understanding among activists was that, with so much of the DC police force already deployed along the parade route, the only way to bring in enough of them to conduct a mass arrest would have been to call in the National Guard (there were units positioned outside the city), and that the political brass had already decided they did not want the history books to record that, in order to inaugurate Bush after such a contested election, it was necessary to call in the National Guard.

These examples are useful, I think, in bringing home the complex mix of tactical and political calculations that define the balance of forces; a calculus that is never completely understood, I think, by any single party, since neither activists nor officials ever fully grasp what the other side is thinking. Such considerations will become extremely important later, when we try to understand what sort of political efficacy such actions actually have. For now, let me conclude simply by stressing that, in contrast to the self-organized groups typical of direct action, crowds of marchers have an enormous inertia, and are extremely difficult to move around. Many experienced activists assume that to turn several thousand marchers around—say, to get a crowd marching in one direction to head back and down a parallel street to evade a police roadblock—is simply impossible. It's not (I've done it myself), but it takes a small handful of people willing to act as decisive leaders: for instance, by finding a very tall object such as a giant puppet, preferably accompanied by musicians, setting it in the right direction, convincing a few large clumps of people to follow them, and then fanning out as rapidly as possible to tell everyone else that the march is now heading in another direction, as if it were fait accompli. In other words, there is something about the very dynamic of an undifferentiated crowd that more or less demands some individuals take a leadership role.

I would even suggest that if one wishes to understand the difference between the old-fashioned leftist concept of "the masses," and the newer notion of "multitude," one might best consider the difference between the unorganized crowd—a mass of undifferentiated individuals, subject to all the rumors, panics, and passions so endlessly documented by crowd psychologists (Le Bon 1921; Canetti 1962; etc.)—and the self-organized crowd conducting a mass action. The latter is at once made up of endless cell-like affinity groups, but crosscut by networks of comms units, medics, performers, legal observers, support groups, and media liaisons, ranged by the degree of risk they are willing to endure and level of training or preparation. These groups are usually themselves then organized into "slices" and "clusters" and, at the same time, with each cell highlighting only one particular aspect of multiple political identities as a basis of affinity for this particular action: queer activists from Cleveland, autonomous Marxists, pagans, Wobblies, punk rockers from LA, and animal rights activists from New Jersey. There are very few ways in which the "mass" and "multitude" are the same.

Second Example: Picket Line

Unlike most marches and rallies, picket lines are directly confrontational, and everyone involved knows precisely who is being confronted. The ultimate target is of course management, the owners or directors of the struck enterprise. The immediate, flesh-and-blood target is anyone who threatens to cross the picket line: clients, customers, or scabs. Opponents may also include police, detectives, or private security hired by the employers, and others attempting to disrupt the line or ensure those wishing to cross can do so, and, sometimes, even counter-picketers assembled by the other side. In this sense, the "audience" and "target" largely overlap—one actually is trying to persuade identifiable members of the public not to do something—though in a larger sense one is also playing to a broader "public," including, potentially, elements of the legal and political establishment who might be influenced by public opinion to intercede on the strikers' behalf. (In this latter sense, strikes shade into protest.)

As I noted in Chapter 5, this situation emerges from a unique historical situation: picket lines started out as a very radical form of direct action, insofar as they involved the direct threat of physical force—admittedly, as one of a number of tools—to keep strikebreakers away. Over the course of the early twentieth century, the practice was legalized—becoming perhaps the only form of direct action the US government does allow, even if only to certain, legally specified groups—but, at the same time, it became subject to detailed legal regulation. The use of physical force was disallowed, as an unacceptable violation of the state's monopoly on violence. But that same state monopoly on violence was—in extremely limited ways—substituted, coming to be employed on behalf of the strikers themselves: as, for example, when the government backed up the results of binding arbitration with the force of law. In other words, the police were not entirely on the other side. The result is that picket lines have become a fascinating combination of militancy, theater, and scrupulous legality.

Let me draw my example from a campaign in which DAN was intimately involved, the walkout by employees of the Museum of Modern Art in midtown Manhattan that we always referred to as "the MoMA strike." This was a strike over contract negotiations by roughly 175 members of the Professional and Administrative Staff Association (PASTA, which is Local 2110 of the United Auto Workers)—representing curators, artists, secretaries, bookstore workers, and library workers. (The other four-hundred-odd workers at the museum were represented by five other unions, which did not go on strike.) It turned out to be the longest strike in MOMA's history, lasting 134 days, from April 28 to September 12, 2000; when it ended, most workers considered a dramatic victory. DAN Labor played a major role in helping to develop the union's strategy; in part, because one of the most active members of DAN Labor, Malcolm, had a family connection, being the son of a man then married to one of the main UAW organizers.

This was the line Jordan proudly referred to in the last chapter as "the rowdiest picket line in New York." Picketers were out every day, but Thursdays were set aside for major actions. What follows is one of these, an action built around disrupting a ball being thrown inside the museum for David Rockefeller's eighty fifth birthday. This extract also gives a nice illustration of the role of DAN Labor, a group of activists who, not being union members, were therefore not legally banned from engaging in actions (secondary boycotts and pickets for instance) strictly forbidden to union members by the National Labor Relations Board.

MOMA picket, Midtown Manhattan
Field notes, Thursday, June 14th, 2000

The DAN crew usually provided giant puppets, figures of Haymarket martyrs we had salvaged from an earlier Mayday march. These were kept on someone's roof in Soho but, on this occasion, it turned out, the guy with the key was late—or perhaps it was the guy with the car, I don't remember. Anyway the puppets never made it, and everyone was disappointed.

DAN Labor arrives piecemeal, by subway. When I get there around 8PM, the area in front of the museum is already entirely barricaded off and controlled by cops—who were not, however, out in particular force. Perhaps a dozen all told. The police have set up pens for us that were across the street from the entrance to the museum, around which they had placed several uniformed patrolmen. So we can't even make a gesture towards blocking the entrance, just try to disrupt things and make our presence known.

The picketers inside the pens—and, on that side of the street, also largely overflowing it— include a number of support groups from other unions—including Teamsters, SEIU, other UAW locals. The SEIU people have purple jackets and banners, the UAW, red flags. They are mostly there in small groups of three or four. There was also a tiny delegation from some sort of Jewish labor group. Almost everyone in the pen has some kind of sticker attached to them: there are big cardboard boxes full of stickers and leaflets and other supplies at either end of the pen, which everyone is free to take, including a black one specifically about MOMA workers on strike, a round red sticker saying CONTRACT NOW!, blue ones that say HEALTHCARE IS A HUMAN RIGHT, and another saying MODERN ART, ANCIENT WAGES. The strikers are in a very wide variety of attire, ranging from union jackets to a few in black tie or other fancy dress, presumably to impress partygoers being handed leaflets outside.

The cardboard boxes form a kind of command post: aside from the stickers, there's a big box of signs and sign-making materials, many professionally printed with cartoons and little captions (YOU TOOK THE "TRUST" OUT OF "TRUSTEE").

Our total numbers appear to be in the 200–250 range. It was too fluid though to really be sure.

I run into an old college friend on the street who turns out to be a cousin of one of the strike organizers. Then Malcolm, one of the main organizers and puppet-makers of DAN Labor, who, I discover, also turns out to be an artist: he is indeed in classic New York artist costume, with extremely short hair, sweatshirt, military-style pants, smoking unfiltered cigarettes. His father, who is also involved in DAN Labor, is an old-time labor organizer, bearded with a wooden cane, who explains his son works mainly in oils. We find the rest of the DAN people (Andrew, Todd, Jordon, Nicole, Zack, Beverly, Siobhan) about six or seven in all. Zack is handing out earplugs that he's brought along, which actually prove quite useful, because part of the whole point of the picket is to make as much noise as possible, and since we're placed in pens pretty far from the entrance to the museum, people are making special efforts to make sure partygoers hear us.

The rhythm of the drumming is slow, hypnotic, and extremely monotonous: one two three, pause, one two three, pause, one two three, over and over for hours on end. It never changes. Occasionally someone comes around offering bells and whistles—literally, cowbells and little tin whistles, each with strings to hang around your neck. So the three-beat rhythm, mainly beaten out on plastic bucket drums, was accompanied by whistling, either random, or joining in the rhythm—often, a huge whistle blast only on the last of the three. One woman had an air-horn. Some strikers had kazoos, one DAN woman brought a flute.

Unlike the beautiful, complex rhythms preferred for mass actions, this was quite intentionally not meant to be music. It was noise. Or, perhaps… as I watched them bang out the same three-part beat, over and over, the word that kept popping into my head was "charivari": "Rough music," isn't that what they used to call it in the sixteenth century, when the young men of a town would bang drums and pots and pans to mock prominent citizens who had annoyed them for some reason, put on satirical skits about them, make speeches? Charivari was a kind of elementary—even elemental—form of protest. And this is what it must have been like.

Someone asks: "Where's the rat?"

Last time we were there, there was a giant, two-story-tall inflatable rat next to the pen—the largest of the three that tended to appear on picket lines around Manhattan.

"Generator broke down on the big one, so we sent it back. And the others were already taken."

Around the back

At first, no partygoers are around—there is occasional swelling noise when one was spotted, along with cries of "Shame! Shame!" and "Don't go in!" One guy has a sign saying "Honk!"; he wades into traffic whenever any number of cars come by, and so many do, in fact, honk their horns that at one point, two cops have to step out to warn the drivers not to.

Jordan and some others get the idea to go around the block and see if anything could be done from Fifty-fourth Street, where there is an entry to the sculpture garden, where the party was actually to take place. We gather up most of the DAN people, except one who says he has an appointment and didn't want to risk arrest. Jordan says it's already been scouted out, and we all rue the lack of puppets: if we'd had one, it would be easy to lead a whole bunch of people with us on such an expedition. You can lead around whole crowds if you have a puppet. So we instead go out ourselves, about seven of us, five DAN and two volunteers from the picket line, and a hefty supply of leaflets.

Near the gate is a police barricade, unmanned—there are a couple cops in the area, but not behind them—and anyway, pedestrians are clearly able to walk through, so we take it to mean the barricades were only for actual strikers. We walk past them to the gate. Someone consults a cop in a white shirt—clearly the ranking officer here—who says he thought we weren't allowed to go behind the barricades, but he isn't sure. He goes off to check with his superiors. Behind the barricade is a van full of sound equipment for the party. There are speakers and soundboards scattered all over the street, about to be taken in to the sculpture garden. We chat up the two guys in the band, who were entirely sympathetic ("You're union guys?"—they'd had no idea a strike was even going on.) Could we put our stickers on the equipment, we ask them? Yeah, sure, they said. Why not? Andrew, in a jacket covered with stickers and a backwards beret, is already trying his Spanish on some Mexican restaurant workers by a side kitchen door. Most of us have forgotten to bring stickers; I run off and come back ten minutes later with a whole batch of them, but, by that time, the DAN crew was already returning in a clump.

Me: "But I just got all these stickers!"

Nicole: "The cops made us leave. They almost arrested Jordan."

Me: "What for?"

Jordan: "For spitting."

Apparently the whiteshirt had finally got his orders and they were to get rid of us.

The partygoers start to arrive

So we regroup, Nicole and I and, later Mike, at the east access to the front door on Fifty-third Street. From here, you can hear a din from across the street, and the one two three rhythm, but there is no way to make out any of the chants or to have any idea what the message is supposed to be. The union had cleverly placed a young man in a tux and two women in evening dresses (one was carrying three roses) just outside the police line, waiting to greet the partygoers as they arrived from the direction of Fifth Avenue, handing out sheets of paper that looked like they should have been programmes but were in fact union flyers. Three cops stand behind the wooden barricade, not interfering, but not interacting either. They restrict themselves to hustling the guests in over the line and towards the door of the museum. ("And how do they know which ones are guests?" asks Nicole, though the answer is pretty obvious.)

The rich people appear mostly in couples or groups of four or five, men in black tie. The women mostly in bright spring colors. A few arrive in limousines; most arrive on foot. They come in all ages, except for small children. Reactions to the picketers vary considerably. Most of the men put on an impassive stone-face and try to stride manfully past us, gazing straight ahead; a few are flustered or angry; some of the women look frightened or upset. Others act tipsy or giggly. One or two are clearly trashed on something. We try goofing with the policemen: "Arrest that woman, officer! She's obviously on drugs!"

Andrew soon becomes the star of the show, with an arsenal of stickers and an apparent complete lack of shame or inhibition: several times he walks straight up to one of the guests, pretending to greet them, slaps them on the back, and thereby deposits a black MOMA WORKER ON STRIKE sticker squarely on the back of their tuxedo. Nicole and I, meanwhile, join in with four or five other union people trying to make appeals to conscience: "Please, don't cross our picket line!," "Shame, shame," "Don't go in!" etc.

The scene makes Nicole a bit depressed. "How can people *do* that?" she keeps asking me, after two steely-faced millionaires walked by refusing to take flyers or to look anyone in the eye. "How can they just walk past a picket line?"

"Maybe they give them desensitizing lessons in business school," I shrug.

Jordan scowls. "Because they're scumbags."

Actually, the exchange made me think about the degree to which we might ourselves have come across as hostile or threatening, thus making it actually easier for guests to cross, and feel heroic for doing so. So I try to adjust my rhetoric accordingly ("Please don't do this," "It's really not very nice to cross a picket line"). Nicole is much harsher (she's the bad cop, I later remark to a jolly white-bearded union guy who eventually drops by to join us. "My," he observes, "you've got a whole little gauntlet going here, don't you?")

I give away a couple flyers and stickered a limo, until a white-shirt comes up to us to announce that the next person who was caught attempting to sticker anyone or anything is going to jail. Word goes around quickly that they're

> cracking down, and even Andrew, reluctantly, cuts it out. Almost immediately thereafter, a fiftyish couple in evening clothes appear among the arriving guests, and are greeted by warm hugs from the union people. The husband, as it turns out, is a noted gallery-owner who has both donated a number of paintings to the museum, and was a well-known union supporter. He takes a stack of flyers and promises to distribute them inside the building; his wife takes a pile of stickers, attaching several to the strap of her evening gown.
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> Mike, another DAN person, appears and starts to take over Nicole's post. (His approach is more comic than confrontational: "Crossing picket lines leads to baldness!" "Hey, *I'll* buy you dinner for a hundred dollars!"), until eventually one of the two union captains supposedly in charge of the demo comes to shoo us away.
>
> "We want only union members by the door," she says.
>
> So we leave.
>
> "Jeez, what's up her ass?" asks one of the DAN people as we're crossing back to the other side of the street. "She could have at least expressed some appreciation."
>
> Mike thinks there's a tension between her and the other captain, who brought in the DAN people to begin with, over who's in control. Someone else says she's apparently involved in some heavy negotiations with the police right now, and is under a lot of pressure. There was probably something going on because, a few minutes later, a squadron of eight policemen marched down the street past us, in formation, and took up positions by the wall, exactly where we had been.
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> After most of an hour, the partygoers are all inside. The ruckus continues. I stay on a while longer, long enough to greet the two sound guys from the van, who come to pay their respects to the picketers. I lay some plans for next time, and finally, take the subway home.

Several things stand out here. One is that, as noted above, picket lines involve direct confrontation. While in generic protest, it's often not clear who is being addressed, here, what's going on is much less ambiguous. However important the experience of solidarity, the main point is to have an effect on (specific, identifiable) others. In most marches and actions, there is music to energize and uplift the marchers; here, there is raucous noise meant to annoy the other side. And the operative question is indeed "Which side are you on?" One appeals to those passing by to express support, either actively (for instance, by honking), or at least passively, by not crossing the picket line. Those who cross it are declaring they have, in the eyes of the picketers, violated an elementary principle of morality. Hence Nicole's confusion: we are dealing with a difference of moral understandings so fundamental that it's hard to even imagine what must be going on in a crosser's head.

That's the next point: this is very much a matter of moral combat. There was a time, as I mentioned, when picketing was but one form of direct action employed in the labor movement, and considered a very militant one, since it often involved effectively besieging a workplace and physically keeping others out. When picketing became a legally acceptable form of protest in the early decades of the twentieth century, all this was ruled out. It became an appeal to conscience. But, at the same time, it maintained its militant style. The show of force is no longer a means of physical intimidation; it becomes a way to express just how much strikers feel one would step outside the bounds of common decency if one chose to cross the picket line; just how despicable a creature one would become.

This is true even when one is not really trying to keep people out at all. No one really expected that any of David Rockefeller's friends and well-wishers would see a picket line at his birthday party, feel pangs of moral conscience, and decide not to attend. When a pro-union banqueter did appear, no one even suggested he turn away. The point was to make the other banqueters feel uncomfortable: to know which side they were on and how people on the other side felt about that. And, perhaps, to use their influence to encourage the museum to make concessions and make this annoyance go away.

Particularly interesting here is the role of the police. In principle, of course, the police are acting as impartial representatives of the state—a state that views everyone involved, equally, as its citizens. Thus, in principle, they are the only actors who are not on either side, but simply trying to keep the peace and the streets open. Obviously, they are not really neutral: when push comes to shove (sometimes literally), the chief job of the police is to protect the owners' property rights and to ensure the Rockefellers' guests could enter the building unmolested, even to the extent of warning drivers not to honk in sympathy. Still, as individuals, their sympathies are likely to lean in the direction of the strikers. Granted, the individual sympathies of a police officer are largely irrelevant if they are given direct orders to crack down; but even here, if one consults police handbooks on dealing with "civil disturbance," one finds that the guidelines concerning picket lines are far more generous and much less confrontational than just about any other form of demonstration. This looseness makes it much easier for strikers to see police, if not as friends, then at least not purely enemies— even if that also means that, as a result, they often become confusing and even frustrating creatures.[5]

It's interesting to observe this ambivalence, because it will be cropping up over and over again. It is essential to the nature of police. Police are, by definition, public servants. If one walks up to a police officer with a question—asks him how to get to the zoo, or the location of the nearest branch of the Department of Motor Vehicles, or even, about the meaning of some insignia or acronym on their jacket—they are expected to provide the information. It's part of their job, their responsibility to the public they exist to serve and protect. Strikers—and this is true of protesters in general, of course—are by definition members of this public. In principle, if a protester walks up to a policeman and asks directions, or for medical assistance, or complains that someone assaulted them, the police are supposed to help. And under certain circumstances, they will in fact do so. At the same time, strikers or protesters can, in the eyes of police, slip instantaneously into enemies of the public order at any time, and hence themselves become objects of threats of, or actual physical assault. From the protester's perspective, the result is a constant switching of registers. At one moment you might be chatting or joking with the officer standing next to you, dealing with him as an individual. And he might be either friendly or unfriendly depending on his own personal feelings. Or you might be dealing with him as a public servant—that is, as a person obliged to be helpful, to provide you with information or services. But then, often without warning, they might instantly switch to become the impassive face of state violence—for example, when they are ordered to attack the people with whom they had just been chatting with pepper spray or tear gas, or, to corral them through the aggressive use of their batons. It's all the more complicated, since usually, police command structures are fairly loose and sporadic. Often at strikes or actions, if something unexpected happens, police are unsure of the rules they have to follow, and wait for orders. They literally have to stand by until they are told whether the person standing in front of them and possibly trying to chat them up is to be protected from violence, or threatened with it. It's this constant shifting, and the inevitability of constant interaction in situations of extreme ambiguity, that leads to the jokes, the attempts to humanize police, but also, the feelings of betrayal that almost invariably ensue when police ultimately do receive orders, or the hierarchy reasserts itself (as it did when orders came to clear us away to the museum garden, or when union stewards began negotiating with the white shirts to clear the gauntlet the banqueters had to pass through).

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[5] I have often seen police at picket lines being remarkably blasé even about accusations of sabotaging trucks and similar attacks on property. On the other hand, the same police can, if bribed, suddenly turn extremely repressive.

My final point about picket lines relates to rules of engagement. One consequence of the legal recognition of picket lines is that everyone is clearly aware of what they can and cannot do. Grey areas exist, but not nearly as many as in permitted marches, let alone direct actions, where there is nothing even resembling a rule book that both sides can consult. Many in DAN were convinced that this is precisely what makes union organizers work so hard to keep their people away from the action during mass mobilizations like Seattle or A16. Unions, being the only organizations in America effectively allowed to engage in direct action, have also submitted themselves to detailed regulations about how they may do so, and allowing union members—particularly if carrying union banners or insignia—to enter into an open-ended and inherently illegal situation might jeopardize everything.

THIRD EXAMPLE: STREET PARTY

Direct action aims to confront what it sees as an unjust or illegitimate form of authority in a way that, in its very internal structure, suggests a viable alternative to it. Actually, the same is probably true, in some sense, of protest in general. The result, as we've seen, is that it's often difficult to determine how much any given action should be seen as primarily a performance meant to make an impression on an outside audience, and how much it is better seen as a collective ritual meant to educate, inspire, entertain, and transform the sense of possibilities of the participants themselves. Certainly, there is always a little of both. But some types of action lean much more heavily towards one than towards the other.

If picket lines lean very much in the first direction—they are primarily about communicating a message of defiance to specific opponents, and convincing a broader audience to act in solidarity—street parties might be said to represent the opposite extreme. While they are certainly intended to make a political statement or achieve a political end, they are also designed to afford participants every possible opportunity to enjoy themselves. That element of pleasure—above all, of collective, social pleasure—is really the main point. Even insofar as those taking part in a street party are trying to impress an audience, they are doing so in such a way as to blur the boundaries, not to draw lines in the sand. Onlookers are offered a show, with music and jugglers and clowns. The ideal is for the pleasure of the experience to become infectious, so that the audience spontaneously finds itself drawn in, to either mentally or, better, physically enter the festival.

This element of pleasure is considered a crucial to what makes new forms of protest new—almost as much as principles of self-organization and autonomy. Large actions always tend to be represented as "festivals of resistance" or "carnivals against capitalism"; their organizers always explicitly contrast them with the old, tedious style favored by liberals and socialists, which simply involve marching along with signs.

Obviously, all of this is "new" only in a manner of speaking. Festive protest—if one counts popular festivals that challenge existing forms of social inequality and simultaneously provide at least the suggestion of different, more egalitarian, more pleasurable ways of living—would appear to be about as old as social inequality itself. Even if we confine ourselves to Europe, we can find the ancestors of modern street parties in Roman saturnalias, medieval carnivals, and all those other rituals that played at putting the social "world upside down." There is a voluminous literature on the subject.[6] As we'll see, those who organize anarchist street parties tend to be keenly aware of this; in fact, the giant papier-mâché puppets that often grace those festivals are quite self-conscious references to the wickerwork giants and dragons of medieval carnivals.

Still, there is a more specific genealogy here. In New York, the group that specialized in putting on radical street parties between 1997 and 2002 was called Reclaim the Streets. It was named for a much older, and much larger network that had emerged in the United Kingdom during the 1990s. RTS, as everyone called it, arose in the UK from a very particular conjuncture: basically, between an emergent anarchist movement concentrating on ecological struggles over road construction and battles over the privatization of urban space, and the simultaneous birth of rave culture, which itself was all about using techniques very similar to direct action to seize and transform unlikely spaces—forest clearings, unused warehouses, or abandoned factories—into sites of music, ecstasy, and the endless invention of new forms of collective pleasure. RTS came to specialize in fusing rave culture with principles of nonviolent civil disobedience. One of their greatest innovations, for example, was the use of tripods: in order to block off traffic from a piece of roadway, one could construct elaborate three-legged structures on either end, with a volunteer slung from the top. If defended, it would take even determined police forever to get them down without hurting them. In the meantime, a sound system could be introduced, and the roadway transformed into a public festival. Some of their best stunts quickly took on legendary status. In one street party, organizers drove ancient cars to block off roadways and then set them on fire. In another party—everyone's favorite—held on a newly constructed bypass road in London, two women stilt-walkers circulated about in gargantuan flounced dresses to deafening music, as underneath each of their skirts, a man with jackhammer systematically destroyed the roadway underneath, and volunteers followed behind planting trees in the openings.[7]

New York RTS never managed to pull off anything on quite the same scale. Their scene was smaller, and public space in New York is much more heavily and aggressively policed. In New York, unlike in almost any other city, police seem to consider it a matter of principle that protesters or activists should never, under any conditions, be allowed to take the streets.[8] From quite early on, activists discovered the only way to avoid being shut down or arrested in New York was to keep mobile. The paradigm, perhaps, was Critical Mass, which had been going on since the early 1990s. RTS actions in New York tended not to focus on roadways, but on car culture, privatization, community labor issues, and, above all, public space. The usual approach was not to announce any location in advance, but rather to distribute a phone number or other source that would, at the appointed time, tell everyone where they were to converge—or sometimes, just how to get there ("take the B train north from Fourteenth Street at 2PM and then follow the people with the orange flags"). The first experiment, in Times Square, was fairly successful, but police quickly learned how to take down tripods quite efficiently. They also developed the annoying tactic of heading straight for the sound system, shutting down the music as soon as possible, and then hauling off the equipment—which was quite expensive, and was never returned. By the time of the "Car Free New York City" action in September 2000 (the one I will be using as my example), RTS had taken to building new sound systems into carts or cycles and trying to keep as mobile as possible, playing cat and mouse with the cops. Still, it was just a way of postponing the inevitable. The fundraiser party recorded in Chapter 6 was, in fact, meant to raise money for a new system: rumor had it that it was going to be constructed inside a large iron cage to keep the police away as long as possible. That was Sunday. On Thursday, the day before the action, Jackrabbit, a diminutive philosophy grad student more often just referred to as "the tripod guy," since he was RTS' premier tripod-rider, told me the system still wasn't finished: people were calling all over the place, mobilizing anyone with welding skills to come to Williamsburg to finish it off.

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[6] The most recent at time of writing is Barbara Ehrenreich's *Dancing in the Streets* (2006).

[7] For a history of New York RTS, see Duncombe 2002. For the UK, see Jordan 1998 and other essays in the same collection.

[8] With almost forty thousand police, New York has the largest force of any city on the planet—Moscow is a very distant second. New York police also tend to be far more aggressive in crowd control techniques than most American cities, let alone ones like London: an example is the use of pens already mentioned. Most of all, as many activists who have spent time in different

The action itself was planned to converge with a Critical Mass organized on that same day. Those not on bicycles were to converge at 8PM on the small plaza in front of St. Mark's Church, at the corner of Second Avenue and Tenth Street in the East Village—one of several famous activist-friendly churches in the neighborhood—and then receive printed instructions about what to do next.

Reclaim the Streets Action "Car Free NYC," East Village, New York

`*Field notes: Friday, September 28, 2000*

I show up only five minutes late to the rendezvous point. About sixty people are already milling around the open space in front of the church gates, many in

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parts of the world have remarked, New York is perhaps the only city in the world where police never give up the streets. In most European cities, for example, police will alternate between abandoning certain districts to marchers or protesters, and then aggressively—often violently—reassert themselves, attacking or dispersing the protesters. In New York, the paradigm is one of continual control. It is my impression, in fact, that even in authoritarian states like China, or, say, Syria, the model more resembles the European approach—though, obviously, repression, when it does come, tends to be far more severe.

costume, with five police vans already in place. There are a certain number of DAN types, many RTS regulars (Emily, Kelvin and so on); a few Independent Media Center folks, several legal observers with red armbands. Cops mill around the direct south and southwest of our part of the plaza; no banners, equipment, or any obvious activist gear is visible, but since the location was announced, their presence is inevitable.

Someone explains to me that Critical Mass—a fairly large one, with two or three hundred cyclists—had left Union Square an hour before. The plan is for us to join them, but we were trying to keep the convergence site from the cops as long as possible.

It's a lovely cool evening, perfect for an action. I've brought some bits of costume too: several transparent masks I picked up in some shop in the Village. They're rather creepy looking, since they don't actually disguise your face, but transform your features to look like someone else (rather like someone made of wax). A couple friends take them and put them on top of their heads. "The question," one asks, "is: do these actually violate the anti-masking law. Since after all, they are technically transparent."

"That's a good question."

"I suppose we could ask the cops," I suggest, uncertainly. I'm not sure I actually have the nerve to.

"Well, that *would* mean acknowledging their existence."

"Good point."

Gradually, word filters out to those in the know. There are too many cops for us to start out from here to meet Critical Mass. There are also too many cops on St. Mark's Street, two blocks to the south, which was our original target. So the RTS folks had a brief meeting and came up with a new plan. Everyone is to disperse, wander off in different directions, but end up in front of The Gap two blocks away at St. Mark's and Second, and wait there for further instructions.

Scouts with cell phones are already bicycling about, assessing the situation.

By 8:15, half of us are already gone; people drift off in twos and threes. One large band of activists marches north in way of a diversion. I head off to The Gap with Rufus and a couple friends. By the time we get there, there are already maybe twenty people clumped together in front of it. Quick conference and we decide that we're too obvious and we'd better scatter more, but then Emily, one of the RTS organizers, appears to tell us no. "Word is not to drift off too far west. Also, stay on this side of the street." Three of us walk about a third of the way up the block and end up leaning on a car which, we suddenly realize, is parked right next to a mysterious cart-like object entirely covered by a big blue plastic tarp.

"Hmmm. Wonder what could *that* be?" smiles Rufus.

We're trying to look like an ordinary group of loiterers and not to look at the cart but it's actually rather difficult.

Suddenly, whoops and cheers ring out from Second Avenue. Critical Mass has arrived. The whole street seems to light up. Even ordinary pedestrians take interest. Everyone heads down to join them.

Critical Mass is not limited to bicycles: anyone on wheels can attend, so long as those wheels are powered by human energy. In practice, it's almost entirely bicyclists, though I do notice two skateboarders and someone on rollerblades. A handful wear bike gear and helmets but the majority are in some kind of costume: there are wigs, clown noses, robes—one old guy is covered with some kind of blue glow-in-the-dark threads covering his whole body. Many, for some reason, sport plunger-like scepters or similar props. In the lead is a high bicycle. Really high. Like, two stories. The thing seems to be grafted together out of three normal bicycles, the middle one with its seat at least fifteen feet in the air and accessible by a kind of ladder, and an elaborate supporting structure. On top is Aresh, the famous community gardens activist, dressed as a green pea-pod with a hat like a huge leaf.

They've also, we happily note, managed to shake off almost their entire police escort, There are three cop scooters zipping around in and out of the press trying to seem as significant as their numbers allow, but that's it. The cars and vans that usually follow behind are all lost somewhere, no doubt frantically calling HQ to get a radio spot on our current position.

As we all converge on Second Avenue it suddenly seems there are far more of us than anyone thought: all sorts of activists appear who must have been tucked away out of sight even before I showed up at St. Mark's. It all feels like an unexpected triumph. There are whoops, screams, shouts of joy. Inevitable chants of "Whose Streets? Our Streets!"—except, for a moment, with no other cops anywhere to be seen, it actually seems true.

A few moments of happiness and then we're on the move. Some RTS regulars have trundled up with the sound system and push it along as several bikes pedal off slowly in the lead. Some of the cyclists have whistles and blow them along with chants of "More Bikes, Less Cars!" and "Whose Streets?" No one knows quite where we're going. We head east, then south on First Avenue, up Seventh Street, then stop halfway up the street that leads to Tompkins Square Park. Apparently, this is the spot. The sound system has already mysteriously arrived, and it's unveiled now. I observe that it is, indeed, encased in a great deal of extremely complicated-looking ironwork. Cyclists start blowing whistles again: there's a huge swell of noise of every sort. Soap bubbles floating above us. People inflate balloons and everyone starts bouncing them back and forth over each other's heads. Finally, they get the thing working and music—some sort of cheerful electronica—begins to a huge, welling feeling of triumph and accomplishment. Bikers greet friends on foot with embraces and high-fives. A number of activists with video cameras are focusing on the system: a couple dozen others are already starting to dance around it. All over, people start bouncing up and down.

There are bikes parked all over the surrounding streets, many with drums and streamers still attached. Jordan, from DAN Labor, appears in an all-leather cowboy outfit, handing out pink balloons. Others are dressed as pirates, or priests. There's one startling fellow in a suit with a zillion eyes pasted all over his face and clothing.

One reason for the continued sense of triumph is that the cops still haven't really caught up with us, except for the three scooters; though we all know reinforcements are inevitable. Sure enough, additional scooters appear a few minutes later. Soon, there are lines of them parked at either end of our party. Ten minutes later there are cops inspecting the system, activists all pretending not to notice them, or surreptitiously smiling as one porky white-shirt puzzles over the iron cage and tries to figure out how one could get in. He seems foiled, annoyed, and trying not to show it—as several friends cheerfully remark. More of concern is the condition of the system itself, since its generator appears to be smoking and emitting the smell of burning rubber. At one point it seems to wobble and tip as the commander inspects it, prompting everyone—activists and cops—to dive in and prop it up, forced momentarily to be allies; but then it's safe and we go back to studied obliviousness. Eventually the burning smell too seems to subside, the cops go away, joining a cluster of NYPD vans gathering at the edge of the park, awaiting orders.

So, for roughly twenty minutes, from about 8:35 to about 8:55PM, some three hundred activists occupy the middle of Seventh Street, unmolested. Everybody dances. Even I dance a little when a crazy older woman from the IMC comes out and grabs me. No tripods. But no cars either—the police near the park, we notice, are turning them away. "Which actually means," reflects Rufus, "that we're killing two birds with one stone, since this also ties a lot of them down and prevents them from moving on us until they have reinforcements." Pedestrians seem bemused (we try to coax them into join us but most stay on the sidewalk); curious residents come out and sit on their stoops to watch the show. A lot of them fetch video cameras to film us. One or two accept balloons.

8:52PM: The sound system sputters to a stop. No, it's back on again. There seems to be a collective obsession with how long we can keep it going, as if every minute we can keep the music is a triumph wrested from what, in contrast, can only be perceived as an oppressive daily reality: joylessness enforced by violence. A bubble of freedom.

Whoops resound as Jackrabbit scrambles on top of the cage with a harmonica strapped to his head. He performs a brief dance to his own music and climbs down…

…and, in fact, makes it down just as the cops start seriously moving in. I am standing on a corner blowing up a balloon as an older woman in an orange baseball cap comes through telling everyone to get out of the street. "If you're not on the sidewalk," she keeps saying, "you're arrestable!" She looks impatiently at me, as I've just been calling passersby to join us. I just smile.

"Well, in case you do get arrested, take this card."

"Um, can you give me a second? I'm trying to tie this balloon."

I look up and note the card says "National Lawyer's Guild," a group that usually provides legal observers. So does her hat. She doesn't wait for me (she recognized the obvious brush-off), and continues on her way, vaguely annoying everyone, who mostly do their best to make believe she isn't there. The NLG are usually good activist allies, but in this case: it's not as if there's anyone unaware that being in the street makes you arrestable. That's kind of the whole point. She, on the other hand, while obviously nothing if not well-meaning, seems unaware that by failing to either identify or explain herself, she's ensuring her behavior is indistinguishable from that of the police.

Apparently, the police now feel they've brought up sufficient force to make arrests—there's about six vans down the street now, about fifty uniforms. Which means it's time for the second half of the plan to go into effect.

Part two

During the street party, elements of an anarchist brass band called the Hungry March Band had filtered in and positioned themselves discretely on a nearby stoop, near where Aresh's high bicycle was parked. By now they have, as far as I can make out, one drummer, one trombone, two clarinets, and a tuba. At first, they're just providing little trills and frills to the music the system is putting out, but at 9:57 the music abruptly stops. About a dozen police are surrounding the iron cage and starting to make a serious effort to haul it off.

The moment the music stopped, we all felt dropped into uncharted territory. There was a rapid succession of collective emotions, a sense that things could go anywhere. First came a moment of complete uncertainty, a mood shift but no one knew quite to what. A sudden emptiness anything might fill. Then one person started a chant of "Whose Streets? Our Streets!" and it was taken up by more and more of us, shouted, almost, directly against the police. It sounded like what began as a festive party might turn into an aggressive, angry protest, even perhaps a street battle. Then, during a lull, one of the Radical

Cheerleaders, with pink hot pants and spiky blue hair, stepped into the open area right next to the system and began a chant her group had composed for the occasion:

> *We Don't Want a Piece of Your Corporate Pie,*
> *Because the Whole Fucking System is Based on a Lie…*

The problem, though, is that her voice is high and doesn't carry all that well. A few other Radical Cheerleaders pop up and join in, but others in her affinity group seem to be MIA, and since none of the rest us know the words, no one else can take it up. So that doesn't work. Meanwhile, police with megaphones are moving, followed by a battalion marching in rank, with their usual odd mix of politeness and threats of violence: "Please move up. Anyone standing on the street will be arrested. We're asking you to *please* move up." It's as if they're not sure whether they're addressing citizens or criminals, so they address us as both at the same time. Anyway, it's at exactly the moment the police become audible to the bulk of the crowd that the band kicks in. And it seems like they've chosen the perfect tune: klezmer music, loud, but eminently danceable. Suddenly, it's as if the police have been subsumed, incorporated. They're part of *our* act. They've been rendered entertainment.

People start jumping on their bikes. We all start to fall back and west, away from the police. It's not clear anyone is directing the retreat, but there's an order to it. The main directive force, of course, are the musicians ("We have our own marching band!" one woman triumphantly declares), though there are a couple organizers dashing about in front of them, including Times Up Bill, the usual leader of Critical Mass, a grim, dark-haired, fortyish guy talking continually into an FRS walkie-talkie, and a couple others too: some fellow in a red clown's nose who I don't know, another, an African American woman dressed as a pirate, who I later learn is part of the Reverend Billy Choir.

"What's your position?"

"Are there a lot of cops there?"

"We're heading towards Tompkins Square Park. Do you copy? We're heading for the park."

As we retreat, people take up familiar anti-cop chants ("We're Right, You're Wrong!" "Big Sticks, Little Dicks!") and the band starts a new number—this time, a really bouncy, jazzy circus tune. Extremely rhythmic and goofy at the same time. A lot of us are walking and dancing simultaneously, or doing something halfway in between. Some people are skipping. Others twirling. It's extremely difficult not to. I find myself doing a sort of loping clown walk with a couple of my friends. Almost no one is using the sidewalk; most of us are following the bikes—led by Aresh—down the middle of the street.

We hit the intersection at First Avenue—which is good, as several people had been complaining that we really ought to, at least once, get ourselves on a real street with real traffic to block. Bikes occupy the center of the intersection and we form a brief phalanx, stopping cabs and trucks, then move on.

I am starting to notice that while Bill appears to be coordinating everything, talking simultaneously on an FRS and cell phone now, nobody is actually doing anything he says. Often they do the exact opposite. In fact, everyone is just following the music and the highest visible object, which is Aresh as Pea Pod on the high bike. At Second Avenue, we occupy the intersection again; cabs are honking; cops are once again miraculously absent (how did we manage to lose them?), except for those two or three dogged motor scooters determined to show their presence. We cheer as the bikes form a phalanx again; onlookers are mainly amused by the free entertainment. One drunk in a business suit keeps calling up to Aresh: "How the fuck do you *do* that?"

Someone asks: "Does anyone have any handouts or literature for these people?"

"Oh, shit," says Christine, another key RTS organizer. "I forgot. There's a box of them somewhere…"

"We gave some out at the very start," says someone else. "But I'm not sure what happened to them after that."

Police scooters are trying to dash through the bikes, but the bulk of the cops still trails behind. At one point, the music slacks off a bit and several drummers in the crowd start up a samba rhythm to give the band a rest. We march down a street full of Indian restaurants, a lot of Sikhs in turbans and other South Asians providing us with smiles and cheers of "Bravo!" Other pedestrians film us. Bill is telling me how, back on Seventh, the cops who seized the sound system had told him 'We'd like to see you just try to get it back'—threatening mass arrests if anyone even looked like they were making a move on it.

"It's lost forever."

"Has there ever been an action where you didn't lose the sound system?" I ask.

"Not yet. The cops always go straight for it. They size up what's the object of greatest value and appropriate it. And we never get it back."

On the up side, though, he noted, there are no reported arrests.

More cheers as, after doubling back, we arrive at Tompkins Square—we're blocking the avenue again, the cop vans are gone, though everyone stops for a minute to make way for a St. Vincent's ambulance. The band reverts to klezmer music as we rejoin a crowd of activists who'd been waiting for us (Bill explains "The park was our fall-back spot if things got hairy").

> **Denouement**
>
> After that it's mostly wind-down. The Hungry March Band quickly take off for another gig downtown. We gather in an open space where the bandshell used to be. The Radical Cheerleaders finally put on their new act to a dwindling but appreciative audience. Someone juggles fire, but sparks scatter and start a little blaze among some papers blowing around and several of us run up to stomp it out. Aresh is showing a variety of appreciative onlookers how to climb up on the high bicycle. Everybody's telling everyone else their version of the story of the night ("Gutter had eyes all over his head, and Jackrabbit jumped on top of the system and was dancing like a monkey!" I hear one happy cyclist report, as a friend handed him a bottle).
>
> A woman does cartwheels and some break-dance moves to improvised drumming. Some drunk from the park tosses a trashcan, and everyone again runs in to tidy up. Emily takes the stage to make an announcement: "There's going to be a Nader rally at Washington Square Park tomorrow and the Billionaires will be crashing the party. Meet at 11:15AM at the southwest corner of the park; bring teacups, wear fancy dress, tuxedoes if you have them." She's a bit uncertain in her delivery, making a great play on her shyness, and several people make an equally great show of applauding and cheering to urge her on ("Go Emily!" "Yay Emily!"). Word is going around that there are two different parties to go to after the event: an NYU party in the East Village, and a much bigger one on the Staten Island Ferry. The Hungry March Band will be playing on the ferry both ways: half an hour in each direction, starting at 11:15. That was obviously going to be the best party of the evening, but I'm tired, and eventually drift off home.

The contrast with picket lines could hardly be more patent. In principle, of course, there was a message to the action. It was called "Car Free New York City," an attempt to imagine a city without personal automobiles, and in doing so, bring home the waste and destruction wreaked by American car culture. The idea of banning cars at least from Manhattan had been bouncing around since the 1960s. No doubt, most of the participants could, if asked, have elaborated at length on this theme: rattling off all sorts of statistics about ecological devastation, global warming, the history of oil wars, corporate collusion in the destruction of public transportation, and the relation between the automobile and more general trends of social isolation and the erosion of shared public space. No doubt, too, some of this was in the literature copied to hand out; but I never managed to get my hands on a copy of it: the leaflets appear to have gotten lost quite early on in the action. In fact, insofar as these themes were enunciated, it was really at the fundraiser the week before, attended almost exclusively by activists. This was not that unusual. Critical Mass rides in New York also usually had specific political themes, but I found one could easily attend the whole action start to finish without having the slightest idea what it was supposed to be about. To find out, in fact, I would usually have to consult the report that would appear on the IMC web page and activist listservs the next day. Note, too, that there was no attempt to court or even inform the media—other than activist media like the IMC itself. This might seem a minor point, since there was almost no chance of most mainstream media reporting on such an action anyway (even local cable stations like New York 1 regularly ignored them), but it brings home the degree to which the intended audience was, in the widest sense at least, the activist community itself.

I don't say this to downplay the political importance of such actions (though there are certainly activists who would do so). I merely wish to emphasize that they are not primarily about outreach. They are about building an activist culture and community. That community has always overlapped with wider bohemian or artistic circles. In the case of RTS-style actions, one could perceive a continuum of actions, starting with Seattle or Québec-style "festivals of resistance" (in which the RTS folk did participate)—where there was no ambiguity at all about who was being confronted—to Critical Mass rides or street parties, which were not primarily about confrontation, to raves or subway parties, often organized in almost exactly the same way, where there was no attempt at confrontation or pretense of a political message at all. What's more, members of the same pool of people—activists, as well as ravers and bohemian types—would appear at all of them. Though, as one might suspect, not in equal proportions. Consider, in this case, a subway party, in which several hundred people would unexpectedly converge, along with musicians, streamers, and wild costumes on a New York subway car and ride it through the city. Is this an "action"? I never heard anyone refer to one as such, since they had no explicit political content. But, insofar they were assertions of a right to create new forms of community by finding new—and, technically, illegal—ways of appropriating shared public resources, they are not so very different.

I am perhaps being a bit unfair here. Normally, in practice, street parties and carnival tactics tend to be mixed together with more classic strategies of civil disobedience: as with most British RTS actions, which both had more specific targets, and did not involve running away from the police. Alternately, such tactics can form one element in a much larger action. Still, it's useful to see what happens to a certain logic when it is carried as far as it can go. In this case, what is being pushed to its limits is the utopian element in direct action, particularly, the emphasis on collective pleasure. Insofar as there is confrontation, the "target" becomes an abstraction: car culture, the control of public space, or, in a larger sense, the entire system of social alienation and constraint that denies us opportunities for self-realization, creativity, and fun. Insofar as this malevolent abstraction takes concrete form, it does so in the form of the police (there is no question, here, of police ever being neutral mediators). With the police, in turn, one strives to have as little contact as possible. When it is no longer possible to ignore them, it's time to run away. The goal is to live as long as possible in the sort of world one would prefer to live in: one in which police do not exist. Always, too, the emphasis is geographical: on opening up liberated spaces, however ephemeral, of transforming streets, squares, parks, and roadways that are—in principle—public property ("Whose Streets? Our Streets!") by turning them over to the community, by freeing them from the control of the community's presumptive representative, the State. And, for what it's worth, groups like RTS were, in fact, much more directly tied to actual community organizations—community gardens, for example, or other neighborhood institutions—than groups like DAN, which always had a more international emphasis.[9]

There is actually quite a sophisticated body of theory behind all this. I've already made mention (however briefly) of the Situationist argument: that the commodity system and resultant destruction of meaningful human relationships renders us a passive audience to our own lives—a phenomenon Guy Debord referred to as "the Spectacle." For the Situationists, the only way to overcome the Spectacle in everyday life was to take action for and by oneself, to return to the pure pleasure of creativity, which, in effect, meant turning elements of the system—spaces, images, objects—against themselves. The Situationists were actually particularly interested in the transformation of urban space—the practice, as they called it, of psychogeography—of subverting the drab utilitarian logic of streets and thoroughfares to recreate the sense not only of community but of the sacred. Combine with this the "Immediatism" of authors like Hakim Bey (1991), with its utter rejection of the old model of the grim, self-sacrificing revolutionary and its insistence on the right to experience the full pleasure of freedom in the here and now, even if only in momentary flashes in temporary autonomous zones, making cracks in the grid of total control—and this is more or less what one will come up with. It is all the more important in New York, a city utterly dedicated to the production and display of consumer spectacle, and which, at the same time, exerts the most absolute and total control over public space of any city on earth. The pens, the barricades, the constant presence of overwhelming numbers of police: all are meant to demoralize activists, and they are remarkably effective in doing so. Hardly surprising, then, that every space of autonomy that can actually be wrested from them, either by sheer militancy and weight of numbers—which almost never happens—or by sheer ingenuity, seems an utterly worthwhile accomplishment.

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[9] In fact, RTS activists regularly criticized DAN for what they considered its focus on summits and neglect of local community concerns—particularly, its reluctance to organize direct actions in New York itself.

FOURTH EXAMPLE: CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE (BLOCKADE)

In Chapter 5, I addressed some of the theory of direct action, and how it's distinguished from civil disobedience in principle. Here I turn to practice. As usual, in practice, things turn out to be a bit more complicated.

In common activist usage, any demonstration that involves willful violation of the law can be referred to as a "CD"—an act of civil disobedience. So, on a certain level, almost all actions can be considered CDs. Still, this wider definition tends to be used especially when talking to outsiders: onlookers, the media, police. When talking with other activists, the term tends to be used most of all when speaking of actions that are solemn, public, stationary, explicitly nonviolent, and that do not involve any attempt to avoid arrest. If one thinks of a "CD," one thinks, first of all, of the sort of action in which participants start by publicly announcing their intention to defy an unjust law or policy, and then proceed to do so—say, by locking themselves to a building that's about to be demolished, or across the gates of a corporate headquarters, or burning their draft cards—offering no resistance (or, alternately, only passive or scrupulously nonviolent resistance) when police appear to take them away. In many cases, in fact, to be arrested is the entire point, since arrest and trial affords one the opportunity to explain to the world what one was doing, or to challenge the unjust law. Direct action can be furtive; civil disobedience, by definition, can't.

This might make civil disobedience seem like a mere extension of the logic of protest, an attempt to sway the authorities through an appeal to public opinion. If so, it would have little to do with direct action. This is not entirely untrue. Certainly, with many actions labeled "CDs" it is quite explicitly the case. At one extreme, there are acts of civil disobedience where everything is worked out in advance with local authorities: protesters will march into a street or blockade an office at a pre-arranged time and location, then dutifully march off to be booked. Often, the police will even set up special tables nearby to process the arrests quickly and efficiently. CDs of this sort are normally organized as an extension of protests by protest groups. They are purely symbolic statements. At another extreme, however, CDs and direct actions can become completely indistinguishable: as for example when one places one's body across the path of a bulldozer, or when one attempts to bring down a government by a mass refusal to pay taxes or otherwise comply with its laws. At most, one might qualify this as direct action largely in its negative mode: acts of defiance more than creation. But even this doesn't really stand up to close analysis.

In fact, even the classic theorists (and practitioners) of civil disobedience—Thoreau, Gandhi, King—considered themselves direct actionists. The direct action movement described in this book developed out of precisely this tradition. I've already described how its organizational forms first blossomed in the antinuclear campaigns of the late 1970s and early 1980s. These campaigns consisted almost entirely of publicly announced, nonviolent blockades. The 1999 Seattle WTO actions—except for the relatively small Black Bloc—consisted of mass blockades as well. So did the A16 actions against the IMF and World Bank on April 16, 2000, and those against the Republican convention in Philadelphia that summer. The principal tactical innovation introduced in interim was the lockbox: elaborate contraptions that immobilized blockaders' arms, allowing several to lock themselves together in a way that made it extremely difficult and time-consuming for police to cut them apart. Many of these techniques were originally developed in the 1980s—according to some accounts, spearheaded by the right-wing anti-abortion group Operation Rescue. Classic DAN-style mass actions were built up around lockdowns, even if the lockdowns themselves usually played a fairly small part in them. Typically, they involved four broad categories of affinity group: (1) lockdown teams, (2) "soft" blockade groups, who operated without locking down, for instance by holding hands, locking arms, or forming a human chain, or who act in support of lockdowns, (3) "flying squads" to be called in to fill holes in the line, or wherever necessary, and (4) puppet/street theater/music groups, also, effectively, flying squads, who formed a kind of wandering carnival. The latter were most often brought in to raise spirits or defuse situations of tension. Together, the effect was not that different from a picket line: at least, insofar as the goal was to surround and cut off access to certain buildings. The difference was that the blockade was neither legal nor symbolic; it did aim to physically prevent people from getting through, through any means short of violence. It was also far larger, more mobile, and more flexible.

> Affinity groups were organized into clusters. The area around the Convention Center was broken down into thirteen sections, and affinity groups and clusters committed to hold particular sections. As well, some groups were "flying groups"—free to move to wherever they were most needed. All of this was coordinated at Spokescouncil meetings, where Affinity Groups each sent a representative who was empowered to speak for the group.
>
> In practice, this form of organization meant that groups could move and react with great flexibility during the blockade. If a call went out for more people at a certain location, an affinity group could assess the numbers holding the line where they were and choose whether or not to move. When faced with tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, and horses, groups and individuals could

> assess their own ability to withstand the brutality. As a result, blockade lines held in the face of incredible police violence. When one group of people was finally swept away by gas and clubs, another would move in to take their place. Yet there was also room for those of us in the middle-aged, bad lungs/bad backs affinity group to hold lines in areas that were relatively peaceful, to interact and dialogue with the delegates we turned back, and to support the labor march that brought tens of thousands through the area at midday. No centralized leader could have coordinated the scene in the midst of the chaos, and none was needed—the organic, autonomous organization we had proved far more powerful and effective. No authoritarian figure could have compelled people to hold a blockade line while being tear gassed—but empowered people free to make their own decisions did choose to do that (Starhawk 2002:18).

In this case, then, it was a combination of numbers, democratic organization, and endless tactical ingenuity that turned what might otherwise have been a symbolic gesture into a form of extraordinarily effective direct action.

I think it's worthwhile to think a little more carefully, though, about what's happening in a lockdown, because it seems, in its own way, the exemplary form of civil disobedience

A "lockdown" might refer to something as simple as an activist chaining herself to a gate (the favored technique here is to use a U-shaped kryptonite lock around one's neck: very difficult to extract, but also putting one in considerable danger of neck or spinal injury). Or it might refer to very elaborate contraptions involving barrels filled with concrete transported to a site beforehand. Most often, though, it means the use of lock-boxes made of PVC tubing. Two activists can each grasp a locked chain attached to one side, attach the chain to a bolt in the middle, and thus effectively attaching their arms together. The tubes are too snug for anyone to be able to reach inside and undo the lock, and especially if they are reinforced with duct tape and layers of other sorts of material, they cannot be cut open by an ordinary hacksaw. Police often have to bring in a diamond-tipped drill.

Such tactics were employed quite extensively in forest struggles by groups like Earth First! in the 1990s, to blockade roads or occupy politicians' offices. In most such actions, only a handful of activists actually lock down. Still, even in mass actions, when a hundred may do so, those in lockdown represent a kind of heroic elite—heroic because of their willingness to endure at the very least extreme levels of discomfort, and quite possibly, extreme physical pain. Here is some advice from CrimethInc:

> Ultimately, there is no way to predict for sure how the police will react, so avoid spending hours debating it in your group. It is important to have a po-

> lice liaison present to negotiate with the authorities or at least make sure they understand the situation, and reporters or other witnesses to temper or at least document their behavior. If they start to do something that seems dangerous, calmly inform them that your arm is inside a tube and that you are unable to remove it, and that a team of crack lawyers eagerly awaits the chance to sue them into oblivion. Police will always try to intimidate you; call their bluff, while maintaining your composure. In a worst-case-scenario, they may use pepper-spray or a similar weapon on you—but remember, this will cost them a lot in the public eye, especially if you bear this persecution courageously…
>
> Committing to a lockdown is a serious matter; you must be prepared for the ordeal of interacting with infuriated police officers over a protracted period of time, while being unable to move freely; this will be followed by the further ordeal of being arrested and spending time in jail. Embark on a lockdown in a state of inner peace and resolve, properly fed and hydrated, prepared to weather storms of danger and drama—and if you think you might be there a long time, wear an adult diaper! (CrimethInc 2005:171)

As we'll see, this text displays a certain innocent optimism about the possibilities of tempering or controlling police behavior by appeal to the media, or even appeal to the law. What I really want to draw attention to here is the moral intensity of the resultant interactions with police. By immobilizing one's arms, one renders oneself utterly defenseless and thereby entirely within the physical power of one's enemies. Even under ordinary circumstances, there is an extreme disparity of power between police and protesters—or at least, an extreme disparity in the ability and willingness to use coercive force. Here, that disparity is intentionally increased a thousandfold. As a result those in lockdown are, in effect, compelling their adversaries to treat them with a degree of humanity those adversaries would otherwise likely be highly disinclined to treat them with. It would be easy enough to drive one's diamond-tipped drill into a protester's flesh; in fact, one has to proceed with a great deal of care and attention not to. As noted earlier, activists' interaction with police always tend to be full of moments of ambiguity where there would seem to be a contradiction between police roles: specifically, of protecting and providing services for citizens, and "maintaining public order" by the use of force. For police (and the mainstream media) the normal way of dealing with this tension is to effectively exclude anyone engaged in unauthorized-political activities from the practical category of "citizen"—ironically enough, considering that, in theory, one of the defining features of a democracy is that it protects citizens' freedom to engage in precisely these sorts of activity.[10] Activists never tire of pointing out this contradiction to police and media, but rarely to much avail. A lockdown, like similar forms of civil disobedience, could be seen as an attempt to ratchet up this contradiction to the point where it becomes impossible to ignore. One provokes with a defiantly political act, but, at the same time, forces the arresting officer to exercise the protective care he or she is supposed to exercise towards citizens—or, if taken more in the spirit of direct action, the type of humanity anyone should show to any fellow human being.

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[10] By "unauthorized" here, I am referring to forms of political activity that are neither (a) permitted, or (b) carried out on behalf of recognized institutions. If one is tabling or gather-

Writing about mass civil disobedience presents certain problems of exposition. Such actions defy narrative, since they consist primarily of waiting. First waiting around for hours with one's arms immobilized, followed by a brief and intense interaction with police, then followed again by hours of waiting around, this time in handcuffs, in a paddy wagon or arrest bus or waiting at the station to be processed. A large part of the experience consists of being jailed, legal processing of various sorts, practicing jail solidarity, trials, etc. It's also difficult for me since I have never myself locked down (though I've scouted and done other support work for lockdowns). I took part in soft blockades at A16 and elsewhere, but never ones that were attacked. I have been arrested and processed, but never for taking part in a CD, and I have never taken part in elaborate jail solidarity. So, rather than patch together a fragmentary personal narrative, in this case, I thought it would be more useful to provide an account of another training I undertook: this one, an introduction to nonviolent blockade techniques and attendant legalities, that took place immediately before the anti-IMF actions in Washington in April 2000. What follows are, as usual, drawn directly from my notes:

Legal/Nonviolence Training, Washington D.C.

Extracts from fieldnotes, April 15, 2000

The scene: *A huge church basement, the day before the actions against the World Bank and International Monetary Fund are to begin. Two young women are conducting a "legal training," which is mostly, in fact, a nonviolence training: every aspect of how to deal with the DC police. There are at least three hundred people in the audience, overwhelmingly young people. The trainers are Seattle veterans; one is vaguely hippyish, the other, a punk rocker with close cropped blonde hair, somewhat anomalously carrying a handful of cattail rushes.*

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ing signatures for a mayoral candidate, or for Greenpeace, one is unlikely to be harassed by the police. However, those in any way associated with anarchists are treated very differently. I have seen spontaneous performances by three or four Radical Cheerleaders on otherwise empty sidewalks disrupted by police.

In fact, for a long time the bias against political expression was enshrined in official police practice in New York: if someone was arrested for an infraction like blocking a sidewalk, the normal practice was to issue a ticket and release them immediately; if they were doing so as part of or in relation to a political statement, they would be held overnight. This policy was finally found unconstitutional after an ACLU lawsuit and officially discontinued in 2003.

The first lessons are in classical nonviolence: specifically, tactics of de-escalation. Essentially, we learn, there are three scenarios in which cops are most likely to become violent. The first is when they have specific orders to attack you; in which case, there's not much you can do to stop them. ("We all saw police officers in Seattle crying when they were ordered to attack nonviolent protesters. Didn't stop them from doing it.") The others are out of fear and ignorance, and out of rage. The former can be avoided by making everything you do as transparent as possible. Our two trainers bring in an older man who gives us a little lecture about preparations for Seattle: for months, he explained, activists prepared their tactics, and they actually invited the police to observe trainings, made sure they knew exactly what to expect. "And still they acted like they were taken by surprise. I think they just couldn't believe what we were telling them.") Obviously, you don't want to give away everything, but, if possible, it's not a bad idea to announce your moves in advance to any police who are right next to you, i.e., have someone call out in a loud voice, "We are all going to stand up and leave now," anything that might otherwise seem like preparation for an attack.

Hippie trainer: One of the most frequent causes of arrest at a demonstration is when one, individual cop just freaks out and starts attacking people. It happens all the time. There's a whole line of police; they have orders just to stand their ground; and I don't know, maybe it's the heat, the boredom, the tension, just builds up to breaking point. Someone says something one of them doesn't like, or looks at him funny, and the guy just loses it. And suddenly he goes apeshit and starts attacking everyone in sight. The problem is that when that happens the other cops won't try to stop him. In every case I've ever heard about, they feel they have to back him up. So they'll come out swinging too, and then they'll have to arrest one or two people for assaulting an officer because, otherwise, there would have been no reason for that first guy to hit anyone to begin with. There's a real danger that such a situation can escalate into a major fracas and lead to lots of people getting hurt.

Punk trainer: So when something like that is happening, or just looks like it might happen, the key is to de-escalate. Make it as difficult as possible for the police to act violently.

Hippie: Of course, the ideal is to make sure it doesn't happen at all. This goes with what we were saying about fear and ignorance. There are a few common-sense rules you should always bear in mind when dealing with police. The first is to always try to see things from their point of view. For example, try to make sure that no policeman ever feels cornered or trapped or surrounded—that his back's against the wall, he has no escape route. Like a trapped rat, he will attack. Second, always be aware of the weapon. Never, ever, do anything that could possibly be interpreted as reaching for his belt or his gun. Don't even reach in that direction.

A brief excursus on arm gestures: anything that looks like waving fingers or fists in someone's face is going to be interpreted as threatening; the least threatening is to keep your arms down and palms upward (Huh, officer? You mean little ol' me?) Obviously, if they've already been given orders to attack you, they're going to do it no matter what you do. But this will minimize the possibility.

Punk: So what to do if one officer does freak out and starts going apeshit? The first thing you want to do is to change the tone or environment. You create an aura of calm and quiet so the act of violence seems maximally incongruous. One technique is just have everyone go "ohhhmmm." You know, the mantra. It can spread pretty quickly if everyone knows that the moment you hear one person doing it, everyone else should start doing it too. (Let's all try it: ohhmmmmmmm....)

Second, you point. Everyone surrounding the one cop who's doing something points directly at him, so you have this total silence, except for the ohm, and everyone pointing and looking right at him.

Hippie: And of course that's also a cue for anyone with video cameras to run up and start filming everything.

[*role play follows*]

Question: What if a whole bunch of cops are attacking you? Say they have orders to come out swinging?

Hippie: Actually, we were about to get to that. There are a lot of tactics you can use. But probably the simplest and, in Seattle, we found, the most effective, is for everyone to just sit down. Wherever you are, wherever you're standing: sit. Now if they're under orders to attack you, they'll probably do it anyway, but that way there's just no way they can make believe that it isn't an unprovoked attack.

We practice sitting, with several activists with long paper tubes for nightsticks given the role of cops. Next, we practice going limp. When you are going to be arrested, the important thing is to make it take as long as possible. We practice carrying each other off: it's quite easy, we find, for one person to carry another off if that person is cooperating. If that same person goes completely limp, it's extremely difficult even for two of us to lift them. The police are aware of this and have developed countermeasures: basically, if they stick their thumbs into a certain pressure point on your neck, it causes extreme pain and you immediately go stiff. Activists, however, have developed countermeasures too. It takes a while to find the right spot. So, the moment you feel some cop bumbling around your neck with his thumb, the thing to do is scream almost immediately. That way, he'll think he's found it. As soon as they start trying to carry you off, you go limp again, and he'll just keep on pressing on the same spot again. "I've seen this work a dozen times: the cop is like, what is this guy, superhuman?"

We also practice "puppy-piling"—a technique that can be used if police are clearly targeting one individual for violent arrest. If six or seven people immediately throw themselves on top of that person, it is actually possible to tug them away from underneath and allow them to escape. This is a pretty desperate measure, though, and it's absolutely crucial to be sure the person in question has consented to this tactic before proceeding.

There are three levels of offense here in DC: infractions, misdemeanors, and felonies (these can be remembered by the convenient acronym: IMF). Blockading a street technically falls under the first rubric; really it's not even a crime, it's a violation of certain local regulations, basically a form of jaywalking. Under normal conditions, police would never arrest, let alone hold, anyone for an infraction. They would give you a ticket and be on their way. When they are dealing with political activity, however, the rules are different. You can expect to be held at the very least for many hours, handcuffed or perhaps hogtied, probably held overnight.

Punk: Make sure there's absolutely nothing that looks like or could possibly be interpreted as a blade anywhere on your body. Anything that looks like a blade that's three inches or over is one. You can and will be charged with possession of a deadly weapon if you have, say, a leatherman or similar pocket tool.

The rule however does not apply to nail clippers. Which is very important. Because a good set of toenail clippers will cut right through a set of plastic handcuffs—which will be very useful when they cuff your arms behind your back and leave you on the bus for eight hours or so. Remember: activists *always* keep their nails neat and trim! We always carry nail clippers.

Hippie: That's, um, toenail clippers. The fingernail clippers won't actually work.

Once arrested, the point is still to withhold your cooperation and therefore, to make every stage take as long as possible. Police have a finite capacity for how many arrests they can process at a time; five hundred arrestees all refusing to cooperate can actually jam up their system so badly that they're not able to arrest anyone else. That gives other activists free reign to blockade their targets. The simplest way to do this is to refuse to give your name. It is a little-known fact that there is no law which says one has to give one's name to a police officer, even if one is arrested. It's illegal to give a false name. It's not illegal to refuse to give any name at all. Obviously, the police will tell you otherwise.

Hippie: Which leads us to an extremely important point. *Cops lie.* This is something we cannot emphasize enough because no matter how many times you say it, no matter how many times you see it happen, even the most hardened activist will often find it a little hard to accept. It's illegal to lie to cops—at least under certain circumstances—but there is absolutely no law saying that a cop can't lie to you. Do not assume anything is true just because a cop says it.

In interrogations, in particular, you have to assume that anything a policeman says or even implies to you is probably untrue.

Punk: And that, leads us to another sometimes difficult point. That has to do with talking to the police—at least, in any way you don't absolutely have to. The best rule of thumb is: don't do it. Do not strike up a conversation with your arresting officer. Now, I know, half of you are probably sitting there saying to yourselves 'But cops are people too. Why shouldn't I try to reach out to them like I would to anyone else? Why shouldn't I want to establish a human connection?' Yes, I know. We've all felt that way. But there is a reason. The reason is because it might end up getting you serious jail time. You have to remember that when you're talking to a cop, you're not mainly talking to a human being; mainly, you're talking to the representative of an institutional structure and that institutional structure wants to see your ass in jail. That's their purpose. If a cop is talking to you, trying to get information, that's probably the motive. They're going to take advantage of your desire to reach out and establish a human connection, and use it against you like they would with anything else. And chances are you have no idea what they're really up to. So for example: say you're sitting around waiting to be fingerprinted and in walks Officer Friendly and he says, "So, I just don't get it. What did you think you were trying to accomplish by sitting in that square?" So you tell him all about how you were trying to make a point about corporate domination, or you launch into an elaborate description of the effects of structural adjustment policies in Mozambique, and maybe he even finds it interesting—but the thing is, actually, the only reason he asked was to get a conviction. They needed to establish that you were actually in the square. Half the time they don't even remember who the arresting officer was, where you were arrested, or what it was you were supposed to have done. So now they got you.

The more you talk, the easier it is to charge you.

Hippie: Which is why, no matter how hard the cops try to chat you up, you should just say one thing: "I am choosing to stay silent. I demand to see a lawyer." Over and over if you have to. In Seattle, we made up a little chant we'd all sing together on the arrest bus:

I am choosing to stay silent
(uh-huh, uh-huh);
I demand to see a lawyer
(oh yeah, oh yeah)

Punk: Yeah, that one *really* annoyed them in Seattle.

Hippie: And if you don't even want to have to say that: we have printed up

> these nice little badges you can stick directly to your clothing, which say, "I am choosing to stay silent. I demand to see a lawyer." If arrested: point. We call it the "Go Directly To Jail Card."
>
> ....
>
> Once at the station, you'll be photographed, fingerprinted. Some activists make faces when they're being photographed or otherwise try to bollox things up, but be aware, if you do that, they might get violent. A lot of people put Vaseline on their fingers to smudge their prints (that's illegal, so of course we would never in any way encourage you to do that). Seriously, though, you should be careful with Vaseline, because if it's on your skin and you're tear gassed, it burns horribly. That's why some people put the stuff on their sleeve or lapels for use later, but I'd be careful with that too.
>
> *The second half of the training is largely about jail solidarity, with several role-plays taking place on an improvised police bus, made of chairs. If you're withholding names, usually you'll want to have a series of demands for what you want in exchange for giving them. An ideal wish list: everyone gets the same charges (i.e., drop all felony charges, which tend to be fairly randomly assessed against specific individuals), access to medical treatment for the injured or those with conditions demanding it, ability to cite out with no permanent record. If they are really jammed up and itching to get rid of you, you can usually get most of what you're asking for, usually with the exception of the felony charges. But this will require negotiation, and, in general, you'll want to start by creating a structure for decision making for arrestees. For example, consense on one person to act as facilitator for internal discussion, and another to act as spokesperson/liaison with the cops. Then there are crises that will need some immediate response. For example, generally police consider people of color fair game for more brutal treatment; if they can, they'll try to divide people on racial or ethnic lines. A possible scenario: if there are a handful of people of color on the bus, the cops might remove one for special charges, even, maybe, rough them up outside, or make you think they're being roughed up, to intimidate you. We go through various possible responses, with escalating tactics leading up to everyone throwing their weight back and forth to shake the bus (if you do it long enough, you can actually knock the bus over). Though the latter is a last resort, not to be attempted unless you want to make sure everyone in the vicinity knows there's something going terribly, terribly wrong.*

Compared with the street party, one could say things have come full circle: from an emphasis on the activists' experience—particularly, the experience of pleasure and conviviality—to actions that are largely about influencing a target or an audience through willingness to undergo pain. One should not, perhaps, go too far with this. The actions that followed on April 16 were, in fact, both simultaneously. At each major intersection there were lockdown teams, surrounded by blockaders linking hands, but also music, dancing, street theater, and periodic visits by colorful giant puppets. Even the mood would shift back and forth between moments of intense silent anticipation, as word would spread of possible police attack, to festival, then back again to silent intensity.

Almost any exponent of civil disobedience will agree that the point is to expose the true nature of a system of unjust authority. One exposes the inherent violence of the system by revealing precisely what it is prepared to do to those who challenge it; even if those challenging it would never lift a finger to harm anybody else. It is thus clearly meant to have an effect on an audience. The main point of disagreement—and American pacifists are about equally divided on this point—is how. Some exponents of nonviolence insist—as Gandhi was often wont to do—that the point is not to exert pressure, but to appeal directly to the humanity of one's opponent, to set an example that will ultimately demonstrate to those in power the error of their ways. Others argue that this is naïve, that the point is precisely to exercise a form of "nonviolent coercion"— a form of moral combat analogous, in its own way, to the kind waged on the picket line. As the example of the lockdown has already made clear, it is often difficult to distinguish one from the other.[11]

We can observe the tension coming into sharpest focus when the trainers, above, discuss how to behave in the face of the police. On the one hand, to engage in nonviolent tactics at all, a practitioner of civil disobedience must learn to see things from one's opponent's point of view. This is a basic feature of all nonviolence training. This is also, of course, much like one would also do at a meeting, but the contrast could not be more complete. As I pointed out in the last chapter, one can only find consensus among a community of equals where there is no institutional structure of authority that turns participants into mere representatives of something else. The police are precisely the borderline, the point where those structures of institutional authority—that with which you cannot negotiate as equals—asserts itself in public life. Police follow orders and they expect you to do the same. If you do not comply, they are prepared to use force to ensure compliance. They are, in effect, the wall that power shows to the world. Those blockading the IMF or WTO rarely confront those running such institutions. They confront the exterior face of their power, which is the police. This means that, even if one is employing a purely Gandhian paradigm, and trying to appeal to one's adversary's humanity, one is not really appealing to the police but to their employers. In fact, street cops' personal opinions on (for instance) matters of international trade are likely to be far closer to the protesters' than to those of the bankers, bureaucrats, or government officials they protect. This is immaterial. Many Seattle cops cried when given the order to attack gentle, idealistic teenagers. But, as our trainer pointed out above, they did attack.

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[11] Anyway, one could well argue the distinction is psychologically naïve: people have a notorious tendency to come around to new moral positions—ones they come to sincerely embrace—once circumstances oblige them to.

On the other hand, as the training makes clear, there are all sorts of reasons one might wish to at least moderate certain immediate forms of police behavior. This necessarily involves imaginative identification. Still, it is imaginative identification of the most absolutely minimal kind. It's more or less on the same level one might use when dealing with a dangerous animal: never let it feel cornered, put a spotlight on it when it starts acting aggressive, never look like you're reaching for the gun. Any attempt at further imaginative identification hits a wall. Most experienced activists have detailed knowledge of the varieties of police vehicles (one picks these up quickly if one spends a lot of time, say, doing lookout while others are wheat-pasting), police gear, tactics, and the variety and effectiveness of police weaponry. But they have almost no idea what the average cop is likely to be thinking. In fact, I don't think I've ever been at a major action where I haven't overheard at least one activist wondering aloud what could possibly be going on in the police's heads, in such a way as to make clear they don't have the slightest idea. Or, alternately, only to dismiss the entire question. Here are a couple examples of the latter, that I jotted down:

> **Conversation between two blockaders, April 16, 2000**
>
> Blockader 1: What do you think the cops are thinking? I mean, when they're ordered to tear gas or pepper-spray people who obviously mean no harm to anyone. Or, okay—here's some guy who walks up to a bunch of fifteen-year-old girls who're standing there holding hands, and he starts hitting one with his billy club. What could he possibly be thinking when he's doing that?
>
> Blockader 2: I guess they're thinking, "Hey, I get paid anyway. Whatever."
>
> **Conversation between two teenage Black Bloc'ers, June 20, 2001**
>
> Masked Female Black Bloc'er: You know, I've been thinking a lot about this. About the cops and what they make of us. And I think, mainly, they're just scared. They have no idea what's going on. They have no idea who we are or what we might do. They're basically just a bunch of ordinary working-class people and they're scared and confused like anyone else would be. I don't think we should hate the cops.
>
> Masked Male Black Bloc'er: Oh, give me a break.
>
> Masked Female Black Bloc'er: No, really. They're just a bunch of working-class people and they're scared.
>
> Masked Male Black Bloc'er: Look, every cop I've dealt with on the streets

> was an asshole and every cop I've known personally was an asshole too. Who cares what they're thinking?

The situation is all the more acute because most anarchists are aware that, historically, when anarchists do win—when direct action tactics lead to governments being overthrown—it is almost always because the point comes when police refuse to shoot. It has been my experience, for example, that before almost every major mobilization in a North American city, for instance, police threaten to go on strike, and there is always endless speculation in activist circles about the possibility of an alliance. It never comes to anything. But the idea is always there. Hence the ultimate dilemma: one can't win over the other side if one refuses to speak to them. On the other hand, as the hippie trainer pointed out, chatting up cops can prove legally catastrophic.

It seems to me this dilemma is not just one of civil disobedience. It's inherent to the very nature of direct action itself. The ideal, when conducting an action, is to behave as if one is already living in a free society, where everyone could be treated simply as a human being. Since one does not accept the legitimacy of a larger institutional structure that assigns men and women certain roles—as corporate executives, prison guards, community affairs officers, trade negotiators, and so forth—one refuses to recognize them in those roles, but simply as men and women whose actions have to be judged by the same standards as anyone else's. The inevitable result is they are seen to be engaging in outrageous acts of violence. The corollary is that one should approach them as individuals capable of transcending their role; but, here, the very fact that they are acting on behalf of a violent institutional structure makes this almost impossible.

One sometimes sees the same dilemma in court. This, for example, is from ACT UP's civil disobedience training manual:

> Some demonstrators refuse to cooperate partly or wholly with court procedures; they refuse to enter a plea, to retain or accept a lawyer, to stand up in court, to speak to the judge as symbol of court authority (but rather speak to him or her as a fellow human being), to take the stand or question witnesses. They may make a speech to those assembled in the courtroom or simply lie on the floor if they are carried in, or attempt to leave if they are not forcibly restrained. The penalties for such noncooperation may be severe, because many judges take such action to be a personal affront as well as an insult to the court. Some judges, on the other hand, overlook such conduct, or attempt to communicate with the demonstrators.[12]

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[12] http://www.actupny.org/documents/CDdocuments/Legal.html, accessed July 22, 2005.

This is, as one might imagine, an extremely risky strategy. Very few go this far while actually on trial, much though the logic of direct action does suggest this is what one really ought to do. It also illustrates some of the ambiguities along the ill-defined border between direct action and civil disobedience: to what degree is the point to simply accept whatever the state metes out with equanimity, so as to make visible its apparatus of constraints, and to what degree is the point to insist on one's right to act as if that apparatus does not exist. It's probably safe to say that, in practice, almost no one takes one approach to the absolute exclusion of the other. It's always something of a mix.

FIFTH EXAMPLE: BLACK BLOC ACTION

According to Infoshop.org's "Black Blocs for Dummies" web page

> A black bloc is a collection of anarchists and anarchist affinity groups that get together for a particular protest action. The flavor of the black bloc changes from action to action, but the main goals are to provide solidarity in the face of a repressive police state and to convey an anarchist critique of whatever is being protested that day.[13]

A Black Bloc, then, is a tactic. It is not, as many seem to think, a group or organization.

Black Bloc tactics originated in Germany, in the squatters' movement of the 1980s. It was essentially a way of creating anonymity: young anarchists defending the squats from police attack, or taking part in marches or rallies, would all dress in identical black ski masks and identical black leather jackets. The actual phrase "black bloc" appears to have been an invention of the German media, or some say, of German police. It caught on because it made such visual sense: a thousand people, all in black, in dense formation, often with arms linked, or fronted and flanked by banners that also act as shields, topped by red and black flags, was a sight not soon forgotten. Even if the bloc does nothing more than march, their presence gives a kind of concrete reality to anarchism, and to its potential for radicalizing a march or escalating its tactics. In Europe, black bloc tactics soon spread far beyond Germany, and at major demonstrations, blocs have been known to end up in pitched battles with fascists or police.

American anarchists first began experimenting with Black Blocs during the protests against the first Gulf War in 1991 and 1992 (at one, anarchists actually smashed the windows of the World Bank, a feat never since repeated). It would be deceptive, however, to see North American Black Blocs simply as a transposition of the European model. There are important differences. Some are stylistic: for the leather jackets, Americans have substituted hoodies (black hooded sweatshirts) derived from West Coast skater punk culture; instead of the ski masks, mostly black bandanas. More importantly, there are very different expectations regarding violence. In most large cities in Europe, there are active fascist movements. They see anarchists, almost as much as immigrants, as their natural enemies. To be both openly anarchist and to live by a code of nonviolence, therefore, means to be willing to take one's life into one's hands on a daily basis—or, at the very least, to know one will probably be quite regularly beaten up.[14] In the US, most anarchists are lucky enough to live in places where they are relatively insulated from such dangers. So, where a certain degree of violence is, in Europe, more or less expected, in the US, Black Blocs have been able to develop what might be considered the most aggressive possible version of nonviolence. Essentially, the word "violence" is interpreted to mean causing harm, or causing pain and suffering, to another living being. Black Blocs do not attack living creatures. However, they are willing to employ much more confrontational tactics than other activists: for example, linking arms to push back police lines, or even, as at A16, carrying along chain-link fences to push against them; erecting barricades from dumpsters, newspaper boxes, and other street flotsam; even practicing "unarrests" by snatching back arrestees from police lines and cutting off their cuffs. They also, of course, employ a repertoire of purely symbolic acts: spray-painting, drumming on lampposts, burning flags (or taking down official flags and raising red and black ones).

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[13] http://www.infoshop.org/blackbloc_faq.html, accessed August 25, 2000.

Still, for those who have taken part in such actions, the really critical thing is the sense of autonomy created by an emphasis on solidarity and mutual defense. When you join a Black Bloc, you render yourself indistinguishable from all other participants. You are in effect saying, "Any act done by any of us might as well have been done by me." At the same time, you know that each one of those other participants is looking out for you, watching your back, that while everyone is trying to avoid arrest, the one situation in which most will be willing to risk arrest will be to save you from being arrested. It's precisely this that, for so many, makes Black Bloc tactics feel so liberating: it is a way to create one, fleeting moment when autonomy is real and immediate, a space of liberated territory, in which the laws and arbitrary power of the state no longer apply, in which we draw the lines of force ourselves. To do that without, at the same time, violating principles of nonviolence is, of course, a delicate and tricky thing, and it's the focus of endless debate.

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[14] I remember once showing the free community computer center at ABC No Rio to a friend from Paris; his immediate reaction was, "but don't fascists come and try to smash it all?" In other words, just as a pacifist who rejects war on principle can expect to be regularly confronted with the hypothetical argument "What would you do about Nazis?" nonviolent anarchists have to face the same problem in far less hypothetical terms. Some do just accept that they will be beaten up periodically; others fight back. It's interesting that, even in the US, the main anarchist group never to accept nonviolence of any sort is ARA, "Anti-Racist Action," which regularly confronts Nazis.

These debates have, most famously, congealed around the question of property destruction, a practice in which Black Blocs do periodically engage. Here, the most famous statement is probably that of the Acme Collective's "Black Bloc Communiqué" issued after the WTO actions in Seattle:

> Private property should be distinguished from personal property. The latter is based upon use while the former is based upon trade. The premise of personal property is that each of us has what s/he needs. The premise of private property is that each of us has something that someone else needs or wants. In a society based on private property rights, those who are able to accrue more of what others need or want have greater power. By extension, they wield greater control over what others perceive as needs and desires, usually in the interest of increasing profit to themselves.
>
> We contend that property destruction is not a violent activity unless it destroys lives or causes pain in the process. By this definition, private property—especially corporate private property—is itself infinitely more violent than any action taken against it.

It follows that destroying an SUV while it's on the sale lot is a legitimate act, but destroying one that's become someone's personal means of transportation, is not; smashing a Starbucks or Niketown window is a legitimate act, but trashing an owner-operated coffee shop or shoe store is strictly illegitimate. Generally speaking, such restrictions are scrupulously observed. When property destruction does occur, targets are researched in advance, and often some kind of explanation offered: as for instance, when during the Québec City actions one affinity group trashed a gas station owned by Dutch Shell and spray painted next to it the words "In Memory of Ken Saro-Wiwa."

Since Black Blocs have become so identified with property destruction in the public mind, it's important to emphasize that's not their main purpose. In fact, most Black Blocs do not engage in this particular tactic at all. The real point is to radicalize tactics and messages, and, increasingly, to provide support for less experienced and more vulnerable protesters. Hence, the "Revolutionary Anti-Capitalist Bloc" at A16, only four months after Seattle, made an explicit decision not to engage in property destruction, but only to support the lockdowns. The "Revolutionary Anti-Authoritarian Bloc" (RAAB) that took part in the actions around the Republican convention in Philadelphia on August 1, 2000, did engage in some limited attacks on property—mainly on police cars and other symbols of state authority—but these were mainly meant to divert police away from lockdowns. The following account is of my own experience with that bloc even if, like most of the examples I've been using, it's meant to spill over, outside the frame at least a little.

I had nothing to do with planning the Philly RAAB, and fell in with them somewhat by accident. At the time, I was working with the R2K Media Collective, and had been sent out on the streets to report on the action to activist media liaisons, who, in turn, were trying to provide the corporate media with information on the days' events. Shortly after arriving in Logan Circle, I ran into a small column of about fifty anarchists in black bloc,[15] moving south at Eighteenth and Frank, and decided to join them.

Republican Convention Protests, Downtown Philadelphia
Fieldnotes, August 1, 2000, 3:55PM on a very hot day

I estimate about fifty in the column, mostly wearing black, mostly masked. The gender balance seems perhaps 60/40. There are remarkably few police around: just three standing on the corner that leads to Logan Square. There is, however, already one news cameraman tagging along.

At first they're marching, chanting:

2, 4, 6, 8
Fuck the police state!

After a while someone starts in on a more elaborate chant, and that gets picked up by everyone:

1,2,3,4
Eat the rich and feed the poor!
5,6,7,8
Organize to smash the state!

By 4:00PM, chanting "Shut 'em Down! Shut 'em Down!" we begin a winding peregrination through the streets north of City Hall, hauling newspaper boxes and garbage cans into the street to block traffic, hauling dumpsters to assemble makeshift barricades, chanting, calling on bystanders to join us, but always soon after moving on… The Bloc'ers seem to range in age from sixteen to twenty-five, with a smattering of older activists; a few have red and black bandanas. Actually, this is not technically a "bloc," someone explains to me, since classic bloc tactics are to form dense squares using banners (or shields) as protection. This is more of a "swarm." The idea is to stay as mobile as possible.

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[15] The phrase "in black bloc" is used to mean dressed up in black, and in appropriate formation.

There's one guy accompanying us on a bicycle, unmasked, carrying a video camera. People keep shouting at him, assuming he's a cop. He keeps denying it.

"You know, between the crew cut and the athletic build, you do kind of look like one," I point out.

"What can I do?" he says. "I'm in the army!"

Amy, an IMC journalist who was already with them when I joined, tells me the group was moving towards the Four Seasons Hotel on Logan Circle and had started barricading the street when police began moving towards them; they quickly took off. This was right before I joined up. By the time we're heading down Eighteenth towards a rendezvous with the rest of the bloc, we've been detected, and are soon being followed, by a squadron of maybe a dozen bike cops. We thread our way through the narrow streets, going the wrong way down largely empty one-way streets whenever possible, though the bike cops are ignoring traffic laws as well.

Things come to a head on Seventeenth and Walnut, the first point where we run into some fairly dense urban traffic. Three masked activists jump into the street and try to shut down a stopped city bus. It's actually quite easy to do: all one has to do is lift a small panel on the back of the bus, where there's a switch that simply turns off the engine *This is what my friend Brad later explains: "actually, it's not even property damage. You just stop the bus.*" Stopped buses of course create natural barricades. In a matter of seconds, though, some twenty-two bike cops sweep towards them. The three run, the bike cops give chase. In a few seconds, five activists end up pinned against a building just north of the intersection. A dozen cops leap off their bikes, force them to the ground, yank their hands behind their backs, and tie on plastic handcuffs, while the others quickly form their mountain bikes into a kind of fence.

Everything stops. Black Bloc kids drift across the street, masks off, bandanas now around their necks, sizing up the situation. It's only two of us to every cop, not really good enough odds to contemplate an unarrest. I'm furiously punching buttons on my borrowed cell phone trying to get Legal. All I get is busy signals and voicemail.

"You do want legal down here?" I ask someone, who seems prominent in scoping out the scene.

"Yeah, definitely."

"What about media?"

"Sure."

I get through to the IMC. I'm trying to talk the IMC folk into calling medical and legal for me. Amy is interviewing a bemused pedestrian in a suit. An older black woman—who I later learn is an activist from New York named Lucinda—strolls up to describe the scene behind the bikes. "One of them complained his cuffs were too tight," she tells me. "So they made them even tighter." Another of the arrestees, it turns out, is a photographer from *US News and World Report*, dressed in a black sweatshirt, but no mask; apparently, he's making no effort to convince the cops he's a journalist.

It goes on at least ten minutes like this. I spend a little time chatting with Lucinda. (She talks about her grandchildren. "You know," I say, "I was just thinking today was something I could tell my grandchildren about someday, whereas…" "Yeah, whereas I can tell them about it right now.") Finally, medics arrive. Then some guy from legal. At this point, the remnants of the Bloc gather to confer, and decide there's nothing more they can do here. It's time to march south to their rendezvous. Almost as soon as we begin to do so, though, we run into a veritable army of protesters marching north from a Mumia demo. There are red "Free Mumia" banners and lots of SLAM people in the lead, and at least one large cluster in identical yellow T-shirts and baseball caps.

Suddenly, everything's different. We have overwhelming numbers. Brief conference and we all begin marching towards the fortress of bicycles, where the arrestees are about to be taken into a van that's just pulled up to the north. The police are instantly surrounded. A red paint bomb splatters the wall right above them. A smoke bomb lands a few yards to their north, where there's another knot of cops defending the van. It turns out we're just moments too late. They've just managed to shove the arrestees into the van, making it almost impossible to snatch them back. So instead a very angry crowd sweeps around and blockades the vehicle. "FUCK YOU!" a couple masked kids are shouting at the cops, about five or six inches from their faces. The cops look terrified. The Bloc swarms, shouts, looks as menacing as one can look without actually launching a physical assault. It lasts less than a minute, though. Then, like a wave, we pull back again. As we're leaving, I observe the police have taken at least one casualty—or, they have in a sense: one unusually fat officer is lying on the ground, having apparently collapsed from the tension and the heat. Two others are fanning him and administering smelling salts.

Finally, we march down to the rendezvous point, along Sixteenth and Market, where three Black Bloc columns were to merge. The others are already there, mingling with Mumia supporters, three stilt-walkers dressed as red-and-yellow birds, and elements of the Revolutionary Anarchist Clown Bloc: some in rainbow wigs, others fiddling around with four-foot-high bicycles, playing makeshift instruments, singing songs. There are so many I can't see the end of them. It seems there are literally thousands of us.

4:55PM

We're moving up Sixteenth, then to Fifteenth, between Ranstead and

Market, circling around the city center. It's a mixed crew, by no means all Black Bloc. Yellow T-shirted Mumia CD folks are in the lead, followed by a mass of anarchists then, the contingent from the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade (dressed in identical black T-shirts and red masks), accompanied by others from an allied Maoist group called Refuse & Resist. Then, a team of drummers. The Mumia people seem to be initiating most of the chants, which alternate between "We're Fired Up, Can't Take It No More," and a more solemn (but equally rhythmical)

Brick By Brick
Wall by Wall,
We're Gonna Free Mumia
Abu Jamal.

At one point, we stop by a statue of former Philadelphia police chief and notoriously right-wing mayor Frank Rizzo. Some people spray-paint a Hitler moustache and make some other strategic additions to the statue, which already seems to have its hand raised in a Nazi salute. We turn on Broad Street, chanting "Shut Down Capitalism!" and swing past the large, white DA's office, in an old YMCA building next to City Hall. The DA's office is a preselected target. It gets thoroughly plastered with water-balloons full of red paint, as masked figures decorate the surrounding walls with spray-painted slogans related to the Mumia case ("New Trial for Judge Slater," "Execute Governor Ridge"). Oddly, there are no police anywhere in sight.

Now we're heading north up Broad Street, passing Cherry Street. Once again, those small squads of police we pass seem hopelessly outmaneuvered and outnumbered. Around 5:20, we pass a cluster of mounted police to our east—state troopers apparently—but, again, they make no move to interfere.

By now half the walls we pass are covered with slogans: buses are emblazoned with "Capitalism Kills!" and circle-As are everywhere. Members of one affinity group who've brought spools of yellow tape that looks just like the sort police use to mark off crime scenes, but say "Mumia 911," are trying to use it to rope off an intersection.

Gradually, other elements drift off, and we're down to just the Black Bloc, plus a few random die-hards, among them myself: somewhere between seven and nine hundred people. It's hard to get a clear sense of numbers because we're continually moving. The police numbers are still paltry and they're offering no significant resistance. On our second round past City Hall, around 5:30, we ran a roadblock and the cops manning it just disappeared. Heading south on Cherry, a few minutes later, someone pops the tires of a huge stretch limo—almost certainly, people comment, meant for transporting Republican delegates. Almost immediately thereafter, we find ourselves on a broad avenue with maybe half a dozen police cars parked, empty, down the center of the street. Two or three cops at a roadblock vanish the moment they see nearly a thousand anarchists running down the street, and as most of us stop chanting ("The People, United, Will Never Be Defeated" in English and Spanish, "Ain't No Power Like the Power of the People, cause the Power of the People Don't Stop") and a few seal off nearby intersections with yellow Mumia tape, other affinity groups descend on the cars, smashing windows, puncturing tires, spray-painting slogans.

The same thing happens at JFK and Broad. Dozens of cop cars are systematically trashed.

5:45PM

We're off again.

"Let's stay together, people!"

"Tighten it up"

The big problem in any Black Bloc action, is always how to keep everyone together over time. As soon as the Bloc starts to get broken up, we no longer have the tactical advantage. The police strategy, in turn, will always be to wait until they have enough of a concentration of mobile forces to wedge in and split us. That moment has clearly not yet come. We stop, again to the south not far from City Hall, try to gather our forces. Some people take advantage of the occasion to rip down the flag bunting set up around the plaza, and make a little bonfire of it. Brooke appears, holding hands with some boyfriend: "Look, horsies!" she notes, pointing to the state troopers, who are starting to muster larger forces. "When the horses come, remember to go in between the cars."

Brooke disappears: she's not a great fan of Black Bloc tactics, generally speaking.

Another patch of abandoned police vehicles: Black Bloc guys are jumping up and down on the roofs, slashing tires, unloading the last of their paint bombs directly through the windows as others erect makeshift barricades. But rumors are already starting of a significant squad of bike cops who are finally closing in on us. Around Sixteenth and Arch, the bloc is split. I wasn't sure how it happened, but it seems that as we were starting to move out, cops came at us from two directions: several hundred running on foot from the south, another squad of bike cops appearing in front to cut off the head of the march. They flung down their bikes and started jumping on marchers, wrestling them to the ground. (I later hear one medic was badly hurt and three others arrested.) A column of about two hundred of us, including journalists, protesters, and bystanders, ended up trapped on one side of a line of bike cops, the front line linked arms, and began to advance on the cops to attempt an unarrest. The cops started night-sticking everyone in sight. But the main body, which included myself, had already moved on, with no idea what was happening.

6PM, 18th and Vine

We stop to consider our next steps. Our numbers are down; we know we've been split, but nobody's sure how it happened. A mini-spokes gathers in the middle of the intersection as others dutifully begin taping the intersection and dragging out dumpsters as barricades. Members of one affinity group that had been trying to remove a piece of chain-link fence from a nearby construction site run back to announce that a column of bicycle police is on its way. Another police squadron—we're not sure how many, probably not a lot, but looking angry—descend on a group moving dumpsters and knock several to the ground, kicking and clubbing them.

The spokescouncil dissolves. We're moving out.

There ensues a wild chase as the bloc, still numbering several hundred people, is chased halfway across town by a veritable army of bike cops. The police have finally massed their forces. It turns out that Police Chief Timoney had made an intentional decision to ignore us for most of the day, figuring—correctly—that the action was mainly meant as a diversion, to draw off forces from the lockdowns on the other side of the city. Finally, apparently, they have cleared away the blockades on the main downtown streets, and are moving against us. Their tactic is once again to break us up, or at least, cut off chunks from our column that can then be savaged and arrested.

My memory here becomes something of a jumble, but full of isolated vivid moments—the feeling of a warm hand on my stomach as a worried Black Bloc girl held me back from moving into an unsafe street, leaping a parking lot barrier, the very clear reflection that I had never realized just how fast I was capable of running.

"That's a dead end street—that would have been really stupid."

"Stay together!"

"Oh no! We're fucked!"

"No, no, we can run it, we just need to get up speed."

At some points, we were genuinely sprinting, taking side alleys, trying to take advantage of deserted lots and one-way streets. (At one, my cell phone rang and I actually heard and answered it, probably because I was already holding it in my hand. It was Nat, an older activist from the media group, who wanted a report. I told her we were being pursued by bike cops somewhere near Chestnut or Ransom. "Could you give me your exact position?" she asked. "Well, that might be a little difficult, considering that at the moment, I'm running just about as fast as I possibly can." She laughed and told me to call back later.) The final episode I remember was cutting across a parking lot diagonally as cops had blockaded one street and were coming up in force from another. This must have been just to the west of City Hall, because, soon after, just about 6:15 or 6:20, we found ourselves on the steps to Penn Square, a huge raised plaza to the south of it, where finally we could all stop and catch our breath and take refuge, because, it seemed, Penn Square was a permitted rally site, and the cops were leaving it alone.

Or so it seemed.

6:25PM, trapped

What we encountered was, in fact, less a rally than the remains of one. There was a podium and an extremely loud mike, a speaker no one seems to be listening to, scattered literature tables belonging to various Marxist groups (I note one book entitled *Che Guevera Talks to Youth*), a couple score people at most remaining. Lucinda is there and gives me a bottle of water when she sees me all hot and sweaty. Brad is telling stories to some older activists by the wall. I pull out my phone to report in and find myself almost instantly accosted by a slightly dazed-looking thirtyish man in an ACLU baseball cap and T-shirt.

"Can I use your cell phone?" he asks. "I'm a legal observer and I need to report in. I just got beat up by some cops."

He takes the phone off to make a call, then explains his story. He was stationed on Fourteenth Street and JFK, where eighteen people sat down to blockade the street. They were immediately surrounded by bike cops; civil affairs officers appeared to inform everyone they'd be arrested if they didn't move. He was closely observing, taking notes, as they took the blockaders away one by one, when suddenly one of the cops just walked up and slugged him in the face. The guy didn't even remove his badge number.

Brad has walked up. "You're lucky you had that ACLU T-shirt, or they'd definitely have arrested you for assaulting an officer." He explains that this is a perennial problem: if some policeman freaks out in the middle of an otherwise peaceful event and slugs someone for no reason, then the other cops in attendance pretty much have to arrest the victim for assaulting an officer, because otherwise, there would have been no possible excuse for what happened.

Brad, normally almost preternaturally cheerful, is not in the greatest of moods. He's currently without a stable place of abode and has been living in the puppet warehouse for the last week. He was off acting as a bike scout when the cops raided the place, but now he's lost everything he owned. "They got all my rain gear, everything," he says.

"Any possibility of getting it back?"

"Well, if you're willing to stay in the city and be really persistent, sometimes there's a small possibility. But chances are they've already chucked it in a trash compactor somewhere."

There were no police on the plaza; but as soon as I arrive, I noticed that they immediately began blocking off all the exits to the square. By now there are lines of cops two ranks deep at every access point. Apparently, whoever's in charge is keeping us penned and waiting for orders to attempt a mass arrest.

6:35PM

A half dozen anarchists have established themselves on top of a SEPTA van (that's the Philly public transit authority) to the east of the plaza, with red and black flags and a banner saying "End Corporate Rule." They're also scouting for breaks in the line but not finding very much.

6:40PM

About twenty or thirty Black Bloc'ers assemble to the southwest of the plaza, form a mini-spokes circle, trying to come up with a plan. Gradually others join them until there's maybe a hundred. They begin chanting "Anarchy is Freedom," then march to square off against the police. Mainly it seems an attempt to find weak points in the line; they march back and forth between different positions.

One black-clad affinity group is clustered in the shade munching on pita bread and apples as they go by. Impatient glances as we go by. "Sorry. I'm just too tired for this stuff," shrugs one.

6:55PM

There's no way out. It's becoming more than a bit depressing. We certainly don't have the numbers for a charge that could possibly break their lines. A number of people have already managed to sneak past as individuals. But otherwise, there seems no alternative to eventual mass arrest. I'm considering crossing myself—I'm not, after all, with any affinity group and see no particular reason to be arrested. All I'd have to do is button up my nice, red, button-down shirt to cover the anarchist T-shirt I have on and I'd make a presentable journalist.

Rescued

It's at just this moment that the Circus Bloc arrives.

Actually, the vanguard is this odd team called the Goats with a Vote, six guys on bicycles with white shirts and vests, and, in three cases at least, enormous papier-mâché goat heads. They coast directly into the police lines, position themselves smack in the middle of them, and almost immediately burst into some kind of a cappella rap song.

"You see what you can do with a puppet?" remarks Brad, admiringly. (Brad is starting to cheer up. "Anyone else would never be able to get away with that."

The bloc immediately starts gathering on the other side of the police line, opposite the goats. I take advantage to cross over myself, buttoning up my shirt, grasping a little reporter's notebook, asking a female officer to let me through the line so I can get a closer look at the goats. I get through just as…

7:15PM

…the Revolutionary Anarchist Clown Bloc first appears! With the three high bicycles and a number of unicycles in the lead, alternating chants "Whose Circus? Our Circus!" or just "Democracy? Ha! Ha! Ha!"

In the same cluster arrive the Billionaires for Bush or Gore, dressed in high-camp tuxedos and evening gowns. One RTS fellow I know from New York is in the lead, in tails, on a skateboard, blowing bubbles. They had their own chants, too: "Up with Plutocracy! Down with Democracy!" or "Whose Suites? Our Suites!"

By 7:25, the clowns are up against the cop lines—or, would have been, except the Billionaires have formed a line to try to hold them back. There are endless clown meta-chants ("Call! Response! Call! Response!" or just "Three-Word Chant! Three-Word Chant!"). Several clowns begin attacking the Billionaires with squeaky toy mallets, leading to tussles as they end up rolling screaming on the ground. The cops are looking increasingly confused. A line of mounted police hover about thirty feet away, not doing anything, watching. Journalists begin to gather.

The clowns begin a silly dance, chanting "Anarchy for Everyone, We are Here to Make it Fun!" The leader of the Billionaires, one Phil T. Rich, strides in shooing them away, "Good lord, why don't you all do something worthwhile with your lives? Go find someone to work for you!" Several Billionaires then walk up to police officers and start trying to shake their hands; two have wads of fake money and are attempting to shove large amounts of it in police hands and pockets, thanking them loudly for their suppression of dissent. Two get jumped by clowns, causing a few cops to move to intervene, only to be physically held back by their companions.

In the ensuing confusion, the Black Bloc escapes.

9:15PM (much later)

Remnants of the bloc have retreated in bands across town, through the areas where the lockdowns—long since removed—had been; pounding lamp-

> posts, stopping for occasional drumming and dancing or spray-painting, always closely chased by squads of police in cars and on bicycles. Finally, tired of what seems like hours of cat and mouse, my cluster ends up with a dense crowd of other activists in front of the Quaker Center. There's press, but we're trying to ignore them.
>
> Eventually a somewhat stocky young woman in black appears, shouldering past reporters.
>
> "Hey, hey, hey!" (She repeats this three times until everyone pipes down.)
>
> "Can everybody hear me?"
>
> Murmurs of assent.
>
> "We had a fuckin' wonderful day. Now we're tired. Five hundred people were arrested and are being held in different places around the city. The only thing we can figure out that would be effective in helping them is to reconvene at the CEC, and hold a spokescouncil meeting tomorrow at 7:30AM.
>
> "So as for now: get some sleep. Tomorrow we can do jail solidarity, go to the Convention Center, do whatever we decide to do. But right now we're just standing around looking at each other. Let's take a shower. Let's get some sleep. Let's get some sex. Let's… let's get whatever it is we need to be able to get up tomorrow and come back again.
>
> "I love you guys *so* much. We were fucking AMAZING today. But now we have nothing left to do today. Remember: be safe. Be safe. Be safe. If you're going home, be safe and smart. Go with at least one buddy. The cops are biking all over the place and we all know they'll be picking off stragglers. I want to see you back again tomorrow. Okay?"
>
> Miriam, who's there with a small squad of DAN people, calls out: "Group squeege!" and about thirty people crush themselves together, cheering and giggling. General air of glee and awe at our own accomplishments. And then we break up. I head back to the IMC.

This account is obviously not just of a Black Bloc, but it conveys something of the feel of being in one: the sense of exaltation, freedom, intersected by moments of rage, joy, panic, exhilaration, and despair. Mainly, though, when talking about it afterwards, everyone tends to stress the same thing: the experience of autonomy, the opportunity, even if only for a moment, to occupy a space not under Their control, in which the only rules are those generated collectively, by the group—and in which there is, equally, the certainty of trust, the knowledge that anyone who happens to be standing behind you has your back.

This is why Black Bloc style actions are seen, by so many who participate in them, as the very essence of direct action. They create the most explicit balance between creating a collective experience of freedom (as in, say, carnival actions) and direct confrontation with the authorities. What's downplayed, or even ignored, are the usually intermediaries: "the public."[16] But, of course, this is precisely what makes the action direct.

Where civil disobedience becomes a matter of making oneself spectacularly helpless in the face of the police, and heroic in withstanding the resultant violence, Black Bloc tactics emphasize mutual protection. Blocs are a mass of equals, each of whom will risk arrest only to prevent their comrades from being arrested, or to rescue them. All agree that Black Blocs do not initiate attacks on other human beings. Insofar as there is debate among participants, it is over whether interpersonal violence is appropriate to save a comrade who, despite their refusal to harm anyone, is nonetheless being physically attacked by the police. This was actually a common line to hear in preparatory meetings, when people each were asked to describe what they would or would not do: "I would never attack another living being, but I'm not sure what I would do if I saw someone try to hurt someone I loved." And when bloc'd up, one did, often, feel that love extended to all of one's companions. When talking to people after actions, that feeling of absolute trust amidst chaos was always crucial. One activist veteran—his action name is (somewhat incongruously) Evil—pointed to a famous moment when a Black Bloc activist, surrounded by police on a platform at the base of the flagpole at the Naval Memorial during the 2000 inauguration protests, literally leaped headfirst over the police's heads into a masked crowd of activists, in the knowledge that, whoever they might have been, they were sure to catch him. As they did. Really, Evil said, we are dealing with "an elegant fluid dynamic" that ultimately goes back to shared experience of mosh pits:

> In a mosh pit at a punk or hardcore show, all the kids are going nuts, all together, stage diving, circle pits, crowd surfing, asshole bouncers twice your size, so you develop a feel for space, for fluid motion and action. Linking arms to force a wedge through police lines at an action is just like forcing your way to the front of a crowd at a show with slow steady pressure. It's not that all Black Bloc'ers are punk rockers, or vice versa, but when the Black Bloc'er leapt over the heads of riot police at the navy memorial during George W. Bush's inauguration in 2001 to escape arrest, he was just stage diving and body surfing.

Equality, autonomy, mutual aid—all these are, of course, the elementary principles of anarchism.

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[16] Black Blocs almost never carry literature or otherwise make any effort to explain to passersby what they're doing; though they do usually issue anonymous communiqués. During the Philly actions, individual masked figures would occasionally turn to puzzled pedestrians and call "join us!"—but the gesture was always at least a little bit ridiculous. Most bystanders, while fascinated, clearly had no idea who they were or what they were about.

Finally, it's not that Black Blocs are utterly indifferent to the impression they make on a broader audience. They are simply not interested in winning the support of what in the media is called "the public"—a largely imaginary community of white, middle-class families that is, in the opinion of most anarchists, largely a creation of the media itself. Once again, the point is to shatter the Spectacle: in this case, quite literally. While critics will endlessly point out that property destruction steals the show from nonviolent civil disobedience, and is used to justify every sort of repression (repression that is almost never directed primarily at those who are breaking windows), it is hard to deny that the image has struck some sort of chord. Certainly, it is one of the few things just about everyone in America knows about anarchists: that they have been known to break Starbucks' windows. Obviously, it's a deeply ambivalent chord. But if one's purpose is revolutionary, one is appealing first and foremost to the most alienated and the most disenfranchised. As Mac noted in the very beginning of this book, such elements do not need to be shown the violence inherent in the system. They know all about it. What they need is to have some reason to think that the system is vulnerable; that it can be successfully challenged, or at least, that challengers can get away unharmed.

At this point, though, we're moving away from the internal structure of the action and beginning to deal with the sort of questions of representation that will be the focus of the next chapter. Before doing so, I'd like to end this one with some brief practical reflections on the nature of the state.

PART II: STATE POWER

DETENTION

> The Christian in me says it's wrong, but the correction officer in me says, 'I love to make a grown man piss himself.'
>
> —Charles Grainer, former US prison guard assigned to Abu Ghraib

The five examples that have made up the bulk of this chapter are obviously not meant as a comprehensive typology. This is a very rough list, meant mainly to bring out certain structural features of actions in general: in particular, the complex and constantly reshuffling relations between activists, target institutions or other authorities, audience, and police. (I will be dealing with the relation with media in Chapter 9.) Because of the limited range of examples, all sorts of important elements of major actions have gotten short shrift or have been skipped entirely. I've had almost nothing to say, for example, about puppet crews, street theater, "pink blocs," tute bianchi tactics, or pagan rituals—though there will be a little on some of the more explicitly performative and ritual aspects in the next chapter.

The chapters about Québec City were meant to illustrate something about how all these elements tend to come together: the months of planning, the thrill of convergence, the paranoia and security culture that often pervades affinity groups, the shift from aggressive action to jail solidarity and general support for arrestees. Jail solidarity—and the experience of arrest and processing—is usually a very important component of the formation of any veteran activist. To be arrested is to face the reality of state power in what any anarchist would call its purest form: that is, with all pretence of ultimate benevolence stripped away. Those one encounters when being processed, held, and jailed—representatives of the "criminal justice system," and particularly the minor functionaries—as a rule feel no obligation to even pretend to being fair with those under their charge. The shock of learning that police lie and attack the innocent dissolves into the further shock that, behind closed doors, they are expected to behave as unapologetic sadists. The infliction of pain and humiliation is considered the norm (at least, any act of decency is considered a special favor)—but, at the same time, the sadism is almost invariably combined with an almost complete and systematic bureaucratic confusion and incompetence.[17] When completely under the power of the state, one would seem to encounter both its brutality, and its stupidity, in unadulterated form.

This is the regular experience of anyone who's been through a large urban jail in the United States, but the activist practice of jail solidarity—refusal to give names, systematic non-cooperation with the system so as to clog the works and make difficult the arrest of fellow activists—tends to exacerbate both the brutality and the confusion. In Philly, for example, activists refused to give their names and often to cooperate with fingerprinting and photographing. The result was systematic violence. The following extracts from accounts on activist listservs at the time give something of the flavor of the experience.

> I refused all information except my medical information, which I answered in great detail, since I was quite worried about them ignoring my hypoglycemia.
>
> "If my blood sugar level drops too low," I told the nurse, "I will go into convulsions."
>
> "That will be fun to watch," she answered, "since you're not going to get that much food in here."
>
> ....

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[17] It is a fact little known to most Americans (though well known to most activists) that many of the practices that caused international scandals when revealed in American-run prisons in Iraq or Guantánamo are simply standard procedure in American prisons: for instance, throwing cold water on prisoners and leaving them naked for days in near-freezing cells, or chaining people in torture positions to the bars.

On Friday people began to be arraigned. It was at this time that the system stepped up its intimidation tactics in an attempt to scare people into giving their names. One that affected all of us was the air conditioning. While we had all been freezing since we were taken to the Roundhouse, since it was air conditioned and we were all dressed in summer clothing, it is my understanding that on Friday night, one woman actually got hypothermia. The guards came in with their sweaters and winter coats, so the tactic had obviously been planned. One woman who walked past a thermostat told me that it read 46 degrees. We piled on top of each other (quite literally, big people on the bottom of the pile and little ones on top—or in the middle if they got to cold) in an attempt to use our body heat to keep us warm.

If people did not cooperate with the photographing their heads were bashed into the wall. I am told that there was a sign where they were taking these pictures that instructed the officers to wipe off the blood before taking the pictures. I did not see this sign myself, since it was removed by the time I was processed four days later. However, I did see enough blood and bruises on the women being returned to their cells to feel truly terrified that night.

2AM—We find out that the women's leaders are being taken away and isolated. In my six-person cell, three of us finally manage to urinate in the close company, after thirty hours of incarceration. No one has yet managed to defecate since the six of us must sit knee-to-knee in the cell. There is no privacy. We have still not seen our lawyer.

3AM—A public defender—not one of our own R2K lawyers—is finally let in to the Roundhouse.

5AM—He gets to our cell block. The defender is not familiar with jail solidarity and cannot give advice. He just lectures morosely on maximum penalties. Our feeling is that he is not on our side.

6:20AM—JOE HILL is cuffed hand to foot for not voluntarily giving his fingerprints.

6:55AM—JOE HILL is finally uncuffed.

9:00AM—Eleven from our cell block are dragged from our cells, chained together and marched off.

9:15AM—Water in our cell blocks is turned off. Not even the toilet works. An officer tells my cell: "There's water in the toilet. Drink that!"

9:30AM—I am taken out of my cell and stood against the wall to wait for arraignment. While I am waiting, Officer Cassady (Badge 1976) drags WOLFMAN's face through the gutter and then slams it into the cell bars for moving too slowly. WOLF later showed the abrasion on his right shoulder this caused.

[Another activist] is also slammed into the bars by 1976.

> 9:50AM—While I'm standing there, all water is finally turned back on after thirty-five minutes of chanting.
>
> 11AM—I am finally taken in to my arraignment, where I hear my charges for the first time. They are all misdemeanors, but include charges like "Obstructing a highway," which give the conditions and place of arrest I am obviously innocent of. The paper work is all mixed up.

It is critical to bear in mind here that normally the overwhelming majority of those arrested at mass actions are not actually charged with any crime. As the A16 trainers pointed out, they are usually picked up for the equivalent of jaywalking or parking offenses: "infractions," or "violations" (the wording depends on the jurisdiction) that are not criminal matters and would, under ordinary circumstances, have at worst led to a ticket and modest fine.[18] Occasional attempts to up the ante by inventing more serious charges against those engaged in blockades and lockdown—as was attempted in Philly—almost invariably fail in court.[19] Half the time, in fact, arrestees are not even guilty of infractions, since a very large proportion of arrests at any large mobilization are preventative. Police will often sweep up crowds of hundreds at a time as they're marching down the sidewalk or milling about in "green zones."[20] Since preventative detention is illegal in the US, activists arrested in such sweeps are keenly aware that, if they are in jail, it is because the police, and not them, are guilty of breaking the law.

The accounts above, for example, were both written by activists who were among the seventy arrested for being inside Philly's famous "puppet warehouse," a building being used to manufacture props and political art for the day's action.

A few had been preparing to engage in blockades later in the day; most were preparing to take part in puppet, clowning, or performance groups. None had committed anything resembling a crime. They were collectively charged with offenses ranging from "possession of an instrument of crime" (PVC tubing found in the warehouse, which could be used for making lockboxes) to "blocking a highway"—charges that everyone knew could never stand up in court, but were simply applied to justify high bails. Not one ultimately went to trial. After being held for a week, then released, but forced to return to Philadelphia for repeated court dates, prosecutors suddenly announced that, since police infiltrators in the warehouse were not able to identify any of them in line-ups, all charges had been dropped.

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[18] Black Bloc activists are, in fact, rarely arrested and, if they are, are never, to my knowledge, charged with what they actually did.

[19] In Philadelphia, of literally hundreds of activists charged, mostly with multiple counts, only a single activist was actually found guilty of anything—and that was one very minor charge among several.

[20] Before A16, for example, DC riot police surrounded several hundred marchers who had been walking quite legally down a city street, ordered them to disperse, prevented them from dispersing, and then arrested them all for "failure to disperse." The activists were then loaded into buses, hog-tied by cuffs attaching their wrists to their ankles and held for several days. Two years later, during the ACC's "People's Strike," I was with several hundred activists in the green zone at "Freedom Plaza," when the entire park was surrounded and everyone arrested. When I asked my arresting officer what we were being arrested for, he actually replied, "We'll figure that out later." After six or seven hours of languishing in handcuffs on arrest buses, a rather embarrassed looking officer came to announce that we were all to be charged with an "FTB"—that is, "failure to obey" a police order to leave the park—an order that, as everyone was perfectly well aware (and internal police documents later proved), had never been given. Such obviously illegal acts usually lead to lawsuits, though these take many years to be processed and very few of those arrested end up being included in any eventual settlement.

Add to this, the tendency to select certain arrestees for what usually seem like completely random felony charges (for instance, assaulting an officer—these also invariably fail in court, but only after endless postponements that absorb enormous amounts of activists' time and energy), and it's hard to imagine how activists could see the criminal justice system as anything but a blunt instrument of stupidity and repression.

In Philadelphia, activists were constantly being threatened with being distributed among the "general population," regular inmates who, guards explained in often graphic terms, would terrorize and brutalize and rape them. When the authorities, at one point, made good on their threats, the ploy completely backfired. The general population proved quite sympathetic, and above all, extremely interested in learning activist tactics. Ordinary prisoners rapidly began giving each other action names, refusing cooperation, and coordinating collective demands—so quickly, in fact, that within twenty-four hours the activists had been taken out and segregated once again. Almost all of the arrestees, however, came out with long stories of inmates they had met among the "general population" who had been picked up for minor or harmless nonviolent offenses (marijuana possession, trespassing for taking a short-cut through a deserted lot) and, like them, subjected to continual violence and brutality. For that moment, anyway, there was the recognition of an analogous situation: the fact that the laws operate entirely differently for certain categories of people, whether these be poor African Americans, or (at least during an action) political idealists who dare to take to the streets.

Considering the constant brutality, I am always slightly surprised, in going through these accounts, of the emphasis so many activists place on what would otherwise seem quite trivial acts of injustice. The account of one lockdown arrestee in Philly, for example, gave special attention to how she and her cellmate had been placed in solitary confinement for two days as punishment for having "chipped the paint" on their cell wall, in addition to having to pay a several hundred dollars fine. In fact, she insisted, not only had the wall been chipped before she arrived, but the officer actually went to the trouble of pointing out paint chips on the floor as "proof" of her crime—chips that (since they had not been there when the floor was scrubbed the day before) could only have been placed there intentionally while the prisoners had been taking showers several hours before. Obviously, given two days alone in a cell with nothing else to do, it would be difficult not to obsess a little about exactly what would motivate a prison guard to plant paint chips in the cell of an apparently randomly selected pair of activists, and then pretend to convict them for a "crime" everyone knew they had not committed. Still, there seems a deeper reason activists attach such importance to such gestures. They appear to be attempts to hammer home a message: that when in the hands of the state, one should put aside any notion that one's dealings with its representatives will be governed by any recognizable code of justice. "Do not expect us to be fair." "Reality is whatever we say it is." "You are in our power and we can do with you what we will."

This would appear to be the message.

In this light, the equal emphasis in these accounts on apparent bureaucratic confusion and incompetence takes on a more subtle and insidious complexion. In some cases this incompetence is clearly intentional. As many remarked after the RNC protests in New York four years later, it's very difficult to believe the same police who displayed lightning efficiency in sweeping protesters off the streets really needed between sixteeen to forty-eight hours in each case to locate the paperwork required to get them released again. But often there seemed something more subtle going on. One friend arrested at a Philly lockdown told me that over the course of the week he spent in jail, he was brought before a judge on three separate occasions, and each time a different policeman appeared, claiming to be the arresting officer. As far as he could make out, none of the three had even been in the vicinity at the time of his actual arrest. ("How do you think that happened?" I asked him. "I have no idea.") It's as if the authorities were trying to communicate not only that they did not have to be fair, but that they didn't even have to behave in a way that made any sense. They could do pretty much anything they wanted. They could behave completely randomly, and there was nothing one could do.

I think activists are right to see, in all this, something essential about the nature of the state. These are displays of arbitrary power—power that claims to require no reason or explanation. What makes lightning an appropriate symbol of divine power is not just that it is devastating, but that it's random. The symbol of justice on the other hand is the scales: justice is always conceived as a matter of balance or reciprocity. Sovereign power, in turn, claims to be that which establishes the balance; it's the hand holding the scales; therefore, it cannot by definition be weighed in the balance itself. Hence the effort to establish that there is absolutely no reciprocity here. The message is not "if you play by the rules, you won't be punished" because that would imply the existence of some kind of contract. A contract would imply that the two sides are in some sense equal parties. The message was rather: "You must play by the rules. We don't have to. To demonstrate this, let us make clear that, even if you play by the rules, you might be punished anyway." It is the state's ability to impose such arbitrary punishment that empowers it to establish rules to begin with. "Medical condition? Maybe we'll take account of that. Maybe we won't. Anyway there will be no negotiation. Above all, under no conditions will you have the right to complain that we aren't playing fair."

The irony, of course, is that police, and guards, are not really in a position to exercise absolute and arbitrary power at all. Even if they were dealing with a collection of poor black adolescents, or undocumented aliens from the Middle East, there would be *some* constraints (though, in that case, apparently not many). When dealing with a nameless crowd of mostly white activists rounded up at a demonstration, police are well aware that any one of their detainees might, just possibly, be the child of someone important. It is highly unlikely that the dreadlocked girl in front of you is the daughter of the attorney general, but you don't know it for a fact. Should you happen to kill, maim, or permanently disfigure her and it turned out that she was, at the very least one would be facing a minor national scandal. Hence the preference for techniques meant to torment, terrify, and humiliate, but without doing obvious permanent damage. One tightens the cuffs enough to make the hands turn blue, but not to permanently damage them; one smashes a head against the wall but doesn't break a limb. Most of these techniques are mild forms of torture. Placing prisoners for long periods in near-freezing cells (in some cases, first removing their clothing or dousing them with water) is standard procedure in interrogations, or for that matter in many US prisons. So is playing on natural revulsions, such as those against vermin or excrement (law enforcement personnel seem, as we'll see, to have a peculiar fascination with the psychological power of excrement, that can manifest itself in anything from a refusal to allow bathroom visits for twelve hours at a time on police buses, to pressure-point techniques intentionally designed to cause victims to shit their pants).

Still, all of this essentially operates within a relatively limited legal window. As police sociologists point out (e.g., Bittner 1990), the conduct of law enforcement officials is largely unregulated. Most regulations have to do with the use of specific tools or weapons. Apart from those, there are few legal guidelines to what police can or cannot do on the streets, or what guards can or cannot do in jails. What rules do exist are rarely enforced. To hold a police officer legally accountable for, say, beating you in the process of arrest is well-nigh impossible—to be prosecuted in such an instance, a policeman basically has to do something so shocking (sodomy with a nightstick for example) that it makes national headlines for several days.[21] The reason most Americans are under the impression that police operate under extreme constraints is that there is a good deal of legislation that affects anything bearing on a trial. Essentially, what this comes down to is that, if police break the rules, the only thing they are risking is the possibility of obtaining a later conviction. The paradoxical result is that police actually have to be much more meticulous when dealing with murderers or rapists than they do with activists, who, being mostly innocent even of the equivalent of parking violations, are unlikely to ever be charged with any sort of crime. Police in Philly were quite well aware, despite the use of public defenders to frighten detainees, that they stood almost no chance of obtaining convictions. As a result, activists could not be held for very long.

This was the real irony of the chipped paint: the whole little drama of the mock trial might seem a way of establishing total arbitrary power, but it was also a way of creating about the only trial in which an activist would actually be found guilty. Just as activists are attempting to create spaces of autonomy and creativity in fissures within the normal, legal order, so the police too end up doing something very similar: carving out a small space of pure sovereign power in the fissures created by the law. The play on arbitrariness, the sadistic violence, the lies, the violation of ordinary norms and expectations, are all ways of trying to establish absolute non-equivalence between the state and those in its power—despite the fact that police are quite limited in the kinds of power they can actually deploy.

Some Brief Notes on the Rules of Engagement

I think the above observations also have implications for what happens on the streets.

In my earlier discussions of direct action, one of the main points of contrast between different sorts of action was their relation with the police. Does one try to reach accommodation with them, confront them, try to create situations where they are forced to act with restraint, or does one avoid them entirely and act as if they don't exist? In the first two examples, though, the march/rally and the picket line, one can say that police and protesters are operating within the same legalistic grid. There is an overarching structure of law and legal precedents; the details can be worked out on that basis by direct contact between the parties concerned. In civil disobedience and direct action, this is not the case. We are dealing with a clash between two profoundly different moral worlds. It's not that there are no rules. Protesters and police alike tend to operate under elaborate codes of conduct. It's more like a game where each side is playing by its own set of rules.

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[21] Examples here are, of course, the Rodney King beating, or the case of Amadou Diallo.

Some activists, in fact, insist that the whole point is to figure out a way to use the other side's rules against them:

> The whole basic idea of Civil Disobedience works by creating a "Rules of Engagement (ROE) trap," where you know what kinds of tactics your enemy can and cannot use and in what situations, and engineer your tactics accordingly. For instance, let's say you want to block an inaugural parade. You know the law does not permit the use of lethal force to set people to running for cover, and you know that "pre-crime" arrests are not going to be used very much, because they are no more legal than blocking the parade itself. You do the math, and compute that if you can get 10,000 people to just sit down on Penn Ave, it will take more time to legally arrest them all than the time allotted for the parade.
>
> You have now created an ROE trap. The opposition has the choice between doing what you want (canceling the parade in this case), or breaking their own laws, forgetting about making legal arrests, and just resorting to uncontrolled violence. The disadvantage of this for the Enemy is mainly the political impact of being seen as a repressive, illegitimate dictatorship.[22]

Note though how quickly the question turns to impression management and the role of the media: "being seen" depends on who is conveying the information. The author however brushes past this, noting that the real danger to the state is of escalation: how many will then "escalate to physical direct action," or for that matter, guerilla war.

Such is the perspective of the dedicated revolutionary. My perspective here is less strategic than tactical—like any ethnographer, I wish to tease out the tacit underlying principles of action. What are the effective rules of engagement, then, that form the basis of this calculation, and how are they worked out?

Consider again our last case study: the clash between the Black Bloc and Philadelphia police during the 2000 Republican convention, Much of this could be described as a kind of nonviolent warfare, full of maneuvers, pincer movements, attempts to hold territory, advances and retreats. Both sides had also carefully worked out their own rules of engagement. Everyone participating in the spokescouncils had agreed to certain minimal ground rules—for instance, that no one would bring drugs, liquor, or weapons to the action, that there would be no harm to living beings. While there were certainly differences, say, between the codes of conduct of those who adopted the principles of classic nonviolent civil disobedience rules (who had, for example, undergone nonviolence trainings) and Black Bloc anarchists, the latter too were operating within a very explicit ethical code that, among other things, specified what sorts of property were legitimate targets and what were not. Fellow activists knew, or could easily find out, what those codes were.

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[22] Luke Kuhn, post to ACC DC list, Dec 18, 2003

The police rules allowed them to attack protesters more or less at will, but at that historical moment at least, they seemed to feel they had to do so in such a way as to be fairly sure that none would be killed or maimed and no more than a handful required hospitalization. In other words, the situation was much like it was in the jails—except that, on the streets, in an open and shifting quasi-combat situation, it was far more difficult to ensure this effect. Like the activists, police developed various special techniques and technologies and carried out trainings in order to be able to achieve this. The fascinating thing is that not only were the rules on either side not directly negotiated, it's not entirely clear that most members of each side were even aware that the other was observing rules at all. If nothing else, both activists and police appeared to be under the impression that the other side was prepared to be far more violent than they actually were, and considered their own restraint basically unilateral.[23] This is almost invariably the case during mass actions. Nonetheless, clearly, some sort of tacit understandings are worked out and the rules of engagement do shift over time. There *is* a process by which the rules are negotiated, however indirectly. The question for the ethnographer is to understand what it is.

So let me take up for a moment this idea of nonviolent warfare.

Clausewitz is notorious for having defined war as the untrammeled use of force, the moment where all rules are effectively cast aside. As generations of later theorists have observed, this is simply not the case. War is not and has never been a pure contest of force with no rules. Historically, just about all armed conflicts have had very complex and detailed sets of mutual understandings between the warring parties. (When total war does occur, its practitioners—Attila, Cortes—tend to be remembered a thousand years later for this very reason.) As military historian Martin Van Creveld (1991) observes, if nothing else, there will always tend to be:

> rules for parlays and truces and the treatment of negotiators
>
> rules for how to surrender and how captives are to be treated
>
> rules for how to distinguish combatants and non-combatants, and what can and cannot be done to the latter
>
> rules for levels and types of force allowable between combatants—which weapons or tactics are dishonorable or illegal (i.e., even during World War

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[23] On the occasions I've talked to police, none were willing to accept that protesters would not attack them, though none were able to produce examples—outside of places like Prague or Italy—of police who had actually been attacked. Similarly, activists were very reluctant to accept the idea that the authorities were not prepared to kill them.

> II, neither Hitler nor Stalin tried to assassinate one another or used chemical weapons on each other's forces).

There are others too—for instance, concerning the treatment of medics—but this list will do for now.

Van Creveld makes the interesting argument that such rules in no way stand in the way of the effective use of force; rather, one cannot apply force effectively without them. Without rules, it's impossible to maintain any real morale or command structure. An army without a code of honor and discipline becomes a mere marauding band, and when faced with a real army, marauding bands always lose. They're either routed, or they run away. But Van Creveld suggests another reason which I think is even more revealing. In a battle without rules, he notes, it is impossible to know who won. Ultimately, both sides do have to agree on at least this question. Otherwise the war will never end, unless one side exterminates the enemy completely.

In this light, consider the police. Police often like to think of themselves as soldiers of a sort. They place great importance on maintaining morale and discipline. But insofar as they see themselves as fighting a war—the "war on crime"—they also know they are involved in a conflict in which victory is by definition impossible.

How does this affect the rules of engagement? Well, here, I think, one notices something very interesting. When it comes to levels of force, what sort of weapons or tactics can be used and in what circumstances, police obviously operate under rules far more restrictive than any soldier. The rules of engagement (i.e., police absolutely cannot shoot a white person unless that white person fires on them first) are highly constraining. In fact, every time a policeman fires a gun, there normally has to be an investigation. As a result, the vast majority of American police have never fired their weapons. But, in any circumstance that does not involve a future trial or potentially lethal force, there is, as noted, almost no effective regulation whatsoever.

When it comes to the other items, then, what one discovers is that during actions, police systematically violate all of them. They regularly engage in practices which, in war, would be considered utterly dishonorable. Police regularly arrest mediators. If members of an affinity group occupy a building, and one member does not enter the building, but instead acts as police liaison, it might well end up that the negotiator is the only person who ends up being arrested. If one does negotiate an agreement with the police, they will almost invariably break it. Police frequently attack those offered safe passage. If protesters carrying out direct action in one part of a city try to create "green zones" or safe spaces in another—in other words, try to set up an area in which no one is to break the law or provoke the authorities, as a way to distinguish combatants and noncombatants—the police will almost invariably attack or begin arresting people within the safe space. As in Québec, they often specifically target medics.

Why? No doubt there are many reasons. Some are simply pragmatic. There's no need to come to an understanding about how to treat prisoners if you can arrest protesters, but protesters cannot arrest you. In a larger sense, though, the refusal to honor the rules of war is a means of refusing the implication of equivalency that would apply if fighting another army. Police represent the state. The state has a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Hence, it is by definition incommensurable with any other element in society. As police sociologists like Egon Bittner have pointed out, the one common feature of the kind of situation to which police are assigned is the possibility of having to impose "non-negotiated solutions backed up by the potential use of force" (Bittner 1990). The key term here is "non-negotiated." Police do not negotiate because that would imply equivalency. When they are forced to, they pretty much invariably break their word.[24]

This means, however, that police find themselves in a paradoxical position. They embody the state's monopoly on the use of coercive force, yet their freedom to employ that force is severely limited. The refusal to treat the other side as honorable opponents, as equivalent on any level, seems to be the only way to maintain the principle of absolute incommensurability that representatives of the state must, by definition, maintain. This incidentally appears to be the reason why, if you remove the restrictions on the use of force by police, the results are catastrophic: whenever you see wars that violate all the rules and involve horrific atrocities against civilians, they are invariably framed as "police actions."

None of this actually answers the question of how rules of engagement are negotiated, but it does at least make clear why it cannot be done directly, or openly. This seems particularly true in the United States, In other countries, from Madagascar to Italy, the terms can sometimes be worked out tacitly, or even not so tacitly, between organizers and police. As a result, protest can end up becoming a kind of game in which the rules are clearly understood by each side—e.g., "hit us as hard as you like as long as you hit us on our padding; we won't hit you but we'll try to plow through the barricades in our padded suits; let's see who wins!" Before the G8 meetings in Genoa for instance, the Italian authorities were forced to bring in the LAPD to train Italian police in how *not* to interact with protesters, or allow either side to be effectively humanized in the eyes of the other. Organizers with Ya Basta! and similar groups later told me they knew that something terrible was about to happen when policemen whose cell phone numbers they'd collected suddenly all stopped answering their calls. But in the US, at least, the process of negotiation is almost always indirect.

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[24] Consider here the fact that "police negotiators" are generally employed in hostage situations; in other words, in order to actually get the police to negotiate, one has to literally be holding a gun to someone's head. And, in such situations, police can hardly be expected to honor their promises; in fact, they could well argue they are morally obliged not to.

Still, how the negotiation takes place is critical, since that's the real place of power. As any political anthropologist can tell you, the most important form of political power is not the power to win a contest, but the power to define the rules of the game; not the power to win an argument, but the power to define what the argument is about. Here, it is clear that the power does not, in fact, all reside on one side. Police restraints are not self-imposed. Years of moral-political struggle, on the part of anyone from the National Lawyers Guild or ACLU to right-wing libertarian gun enthusiasts, and including hundreds of groups with very different relations to government, have created a situation in which police have to accept certain restrictions on the use of force. These restrictions are, as I keep pointing out, highly uneven (again, all this is much more true when dealing with people defined as "white"), but nonetheless, it acts as a real limit on the state's ability to suppress dissent. The problem for those dedicated to the principle of direct action is that, while these rules of engagement—particularly the levels of force police are allowed to get away with—are under constant renegotiation, the process is expected to take place largely through formal legal and political channels, and through the mainstream media. In other words, through institutions they explicitly reject.

Here, one returns full-force to a question I've largely been skirting over the course of this chapter. Protest is meant to create change largely by attempting to influence something called the "the public." Civil disobedience operates by attempting to "publicly" expose the violence or injustice of the system. So the ultimate judge in the matters of the rules of engagement is something called "the public." But what's that? In the US, at least, the public is essentially assumed to be the audience of the corporate media. Or, alternately, voters and consumers of public services. Still, that's essentially it. "The public" only exists, then, in relation to the media and political classes. "Public opinion," in turn, can only express itself through some sort of mediation: polls, for example, that may (or may not) then influence policy. One can see how far this is from the activist—and particularly the anarchist—ideal of self-organization by considering the fact that, according to the language usually employed by the media and political classes, the moment members of the public do self-organize in any way (say, by joining labor unions or political associations), they are no longer the public but "special interest groups." In this way, the very notion of a public flies in the face of what activists are trying to achieve.

Hardly surprising then that they feel profoundly ambivalent towards playing that particular game.

As a result, the negotiation over rules of engagement takes place largely through the kind of calculated efforts to sway a mediatized "public opinion" that police, at least in America, are willing to play quite aggressively, but that activists, and particularly anarchists, are increasingly unwilling to play at all. There have been any number of attempts to get around this. Activists have attempted to appeal directly to communities—particularly poor, immigrant, or working-class communities. They have tried to create coalitions with unions and other already-existing organizations. They have tried to create their own, new forms of media, and hence in effect new publics: for example, through the Independent Media Centers (IMCs). The results have been uneven, but as we'll see, considering the degree to which all the cards in the corporate media are stacked against them, it would be hard to make the case that they have much of a choice.

CONCLUSIONS

What we have been examining, then, over the course of this chapter is an attempt to create small situations of dual power.

The politics of protest operates within a given legal or institutional framework; it seeks to marshal popular support to overturn particular policies; it might even aim to overthrow a particular government, but it does not seek to change the framework itself. Nonetheless, even within relatively mild forms of protest, there are the seeds of something else. Insofar as marshals do not become mere adjuncts to the police, insofar as rallies do not just exist to support candidates, they provide an inkling of a different form of society and of organization. There is already at least a tiny prefigurative element. When one moves to direct action properly conceived, that prefigurative element becomes the main point: those who carry out a direct action are insisting on their right to act as if they are already free. But at the same time, even here, there are just about always some traces of the logic of protest. Hence the shifting, unstable, and often highly ambiguous relations between community, audience, targets, and police that I have spent so much of the chapter trying to document. Direct action and protest can never, perhaps, stand absolutely independent of each other.

If one carries the principle of direct action far enough, if it evolves from tactic to strategy, it logically moves in the direction of creating much more elaborate, and more permanent, forms of dual power. This is another reason why the EZLN, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Mexico, proved such an inspiration for anarchists around the world: they were one group that was most spectacularly successful in pulling it off. The famous ten-day uprising in January 1994 was, more than anything, an attempt to open up a space for nonviolent direct action; the EZLN immediately put aside their guns, declared a cease-fire, but made it clear they still had the means to continue armed struggle if they felt they had no alternative. One could call this the moment of negotiation; of "moral-political struggle" as I earlier put it to define the terms of engagement, an art at which the Zapatistas have proved most adept. There followed the slow and difficult work of maintaining the balance of force that made the opening possible, while using the opportunity to slowly build up autonomous communities. When one does not have such dramatic access to the force of arms, a common approach is to begin organizing around something no one, really, can seriously object to: a free clinic, for instance, even a community garden. One then tries to build up an independent infrastructure around the unobjectionable institution, negotiate some sort of tacit understanding with the authorities to at least stay at arm's length, and then attempt to expand one's zone of autonomy into a larger community and ally with similar projects elsewhere. Such efforts are always going on. As critics of "summit hopping" always point out, a successful long-term strategy will necessarily have to be community based—though, as defenders of mass mobilizations will often (usually more quietly and tentatively) reply, without the occasional spectacular mobilization, it is much more difficult to do so as it becomes difficult to maintain the sense that a movement is even going on. At any rate, some might argue that this study's focus on the United States, and particularly on New York City, has tended to skew the results: these are, after all, the epicenters of empire, and therefore, about the most difficult places on earth to attempt a dual power strategy. The result is that the groups and actions we've been looking at tend to have a certain insubstantial aspect that would probably be much less marked if I had begun my work in a different part of the world—since movements like this are, indeed, beginning to appear just about everywhere. Nonetheless, that very insubstantiality is, I think, worth study in itself, since it tends to make it easier to observe some of the elementary forms, as it were, and elementary dilemmas of any prefigurative politics.

CHAPTER 9

REPRESENTATION

In the typology of actions that I outlined in Chapter 8, I emphasized that all of these can form elements or components of larger mass actions; but I had relatively little to say about mass actions themselves. Most of these mass actions—like Québec City—contained elements of all five of them: marches and rallies, pickets of corporate offenders, carnivals, lockdowns, Black Bloc actions, and even more besides. No one, however, has direct experience of an action as a whole. In Québec City, for example, I was in the thick of things for three days, but never saw the march, or the Living River; at A16 I joined the blockades, but never saw the Black Bloc; in Philadelphia I was with the Bloc, but never saw a single lockdown. Insofar as one can experience a mass action as a whole, one can only do so through some form of representation: whether stories activists tell each other, or newspaper reports, or summaries patched together later on activist news wires, or through CNN, or in the forty-minute movie version of the action sure to be put out a few weeks later by IMC video teams. It's only in this chapter, which is about such representations, that one can also talk about mass actions as totalities.

The totality, then, doesn't exist as an object of experience. It has to be created through techniques which may range from narrative structures to film montage, the organization of diaries or photo essays, and so on. This means, of course, that there is not one, but a thousand totalities. Each is a political statement: an argument, in effect, about the ultimate meaning of the event. As one might imagine, anarchists and activists coming out of the direct action tradition do not see this as a struggle to impose a definitive version of events, a single master narrative. Multiplicity is part of the whole point. But this hardly means they see all accounts as equally valid, or that they do not tend to be deeply shocked and offended on picking up a newspaper the next day and reading mainstream media accounts of just about any event in which they themselves took part.

This chapter will be partly about such media constructions, partly about activist efforts to create alternative forms of communication and alternative audiences. I'll also make the argument that, for activists, these new forms of media, and above all the ability to immediately play a role in telling the story of the event, are now critical to the experience itself.

It's something of an irony that the chapter dealing with totalities has to be the most partial and fragmentary of all. But I don't think there's any way to avoid this. There are just too many players in this game. From the start, in writing this book, I have had to make decisions about what perspectives to represent. I began by deciding, in talking about differences between activists, to limit myself to the anarchist perspective (especially what might be called the "small a" anarchist perspective), as opposed to those of liberal or Marxist groups. In part, this is because the anarchist perspective is the only one with which I feel thoroughly conversant. Similarly, when dealing with confrontations between activists and police, I have limited myself to the activist perspective: in fact, reproducing the activist puzzlement when faced with even having to imagine what things look like from the perspective of the cops. In this chapter, I am describing the interaction of at least three parties—activists, reporters, and police—two of whose perspectives I have not really researched firsthand.[1] Still, in this context, those other perspectives cannot simply be ignored. For example, much of the latter part of the chapter will turn on attempts to understand the peculiar police hostility to giant puppets. Fortunately, however, other researchers have spent a great deal of time talking to cops and journalists—certainly much more than they have carried out research on anarchists—and there's a pretty substantial literature to draw on. I'll fall back on that literature when it seems appropriate, but still, my account is mainly about understanding the activist point of view.

SECTION I: CORPORATE MEDIA

> Yup, in America we all have the right to free speech. Unless, of course, you actually decide to use it.
>
> —Howard Johnson's cashier to anarchists trapped in the store while the police expel protesters from Times Square, February 15, 2003

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[1] And this, of course, is only at the most schematic. In fact all the groups subdivide: the perspectives of street cops tend to be very different from commanders, or for that matter FBI or ATF, correction officers, employees of private securities firms, police intelligence functionaries, and so on. Corporate media divide into TV reporters, print journalists, employees of wire services, various sorts of radio people, and grade into documentarians, employees of radical or progressive outlets (Pacifica Radio, free weekly alternative newspapers) that are explicitly friendly, or right-wing venues like Fox News that are openly hostile; there are also various sorts of activist or independent journalists with very different issues and perspectives.

An Initial Note on the Effects of Mainstream Media Representation

Anarchists tend to abhor the corporate media. Most refuse to even speak to professional reporters. Even those who do media work during actions, who form phone banks and street teams to promulgate the organizers' point of view, take it for granted that the corporate media is essentially a venue for propaganda, and that, newspapers and TV networks being capitalist firms, it would be hopelessly naïve to believe they could ever be expected to correctly convey an anti-capitalist point of view. During large mobilizations, it is assumed from the start that the media will be systematically biased in favor of the police.

Here again I must declare my own biases. I think they're right. I have done a fair amount of work with anarchist media teams and just about everything I have seen tends to confirm this. I often say that the most one can really expect from the corporate media during a major mobilization is to inform the public that an objectionable institution exists. Under no circumstances can one expect the media to accurately inform the public as to *why* protesters find it objectionable. The actions that are most successful, in media terms, are ones in which it suffices just to point. Before Seattle, in November 1999, very few people in the US had heard of the WTO. While activists failed to get their central message that institutions like the WTO were a threat to the very principle of democracy into any newspaper, just pointing out the existence of the WTO had much the same effect. The same was true of the IMF and World Bank highlighted five months later at A16, institutions that had become some of the main instruments of American power in the world, but that most Americans had never heard of. When two months later, at the Republican convention, DAN decided to make an issue of the "prison industrial complex"—the fact that more and more products in the US are manufactured by convicts, and that corporations who employ prison labor almost invariably also provide massive campaign contributions to political candidates in favor of maintaining harsh sentencing guidelines that have, since the 1980s, tripled the number of convicts in America by filling the jails with nonviolent drug offenders—this proved far too complex a message. It required analysis. Therefore, when the media didn't take up the story, the message was simply lost.

As for bias in favor of police, this can be demonstrated quite easily. One need simply compare the typical impressions of ordinary citizens who happen to wander into the scene of an action without any preconception or political bias, and what the same citizens typically think if they watch the event on the news. As anyone who had engaged in numerous street actions can tell you, people who wander onto the scene of an action almost invariably leave sympathetic to the protesters. At the same time, they tend to be first startled, then outraged, on witnessing the conduct of police. This is so notoriously the case that it often creates a moral dilemma for organizers. On the one hand, you don't want to hold an action in a place where a lot of innocent bystanders might end up dodging tear gas canisters, having to run in terror from baton-wielding riot cops, or being swept up in indiscriminate mass arrests. On the other hand, any organizer is aware that absolutely nothing radicalizes ordinary citizens so much as seeing what it's like to be in the middle of an action. Almost invariably, the decision is finally made not to endanger innocents. But almost invariably, too, the decision is made with the wistful knowledge that doing otherwise would have produced at least a half dozen angry new anarchists.

At the same time, these very same citizens, were they to watch the same event on TV or read about it in the newspapers, almost never react that way. If anything, media coverage is more likely to leave the audience inclined to support police repression—which is always framed as protecting, and never as endangering, "the public." Representations, then, do make a difference. Often they exactly reverse the perspective an eye witness would have had.

Of course, this is only true if the event is covered by the media at all. Another matter that often comes as a shock to onlookers is the fact that the events they are witnessing are not considered national news stories—or often even local ones. I still have a vivid memory of a conversation with a Pakistani shopkeeper at a sandwich shop, a block away from a police precinct in Lower Manhattan. It was the night of the Peltier march, and four Black Bloc anarchists had been snatched arbitrarily out of the parade by police and were being held at the station; about thirty or forty activists had assembled outside to do jail solidarity. At one point, three of us came to his shop to use the bathroom and pick up water and other supplies. We struck up a conversation. As we explained what had happened, he became increasingly indignant. "But, you should call CNN!" he kept insisting, and couldn't understand why several of us started laughing. "No, really! You know who you should call? One of those local news stations, like NBC. I'll let you use my phone. What about New York 1? I bet they'd make this their lead story." He seemed so sincere and well-intentioned that finally we pretended to agree, and someone produced a cellphone. He left assuring us he'd be watching for us on the nightly news.

In reality, of course, it doesn't even occur to most seasoned activists to inform TV reporters of any but the most massive actions, let alone of cases of police misconduct (one would just be wasting one's time and energy)—just as it never seems to occur to ordinary citizens that major news outlets would *not* be interested in such events.

There are reasons for this. In the United States, for example, the habit of considering most protests un-newsworthy seems to go back to a widespread feeling within the industry that the media paid too much attention to protests in the

1960s. According to what seems to have become folk wisdom among reporters (at least those I have talked to about the matter), TV coverage in particular is seen as having driven radical student groups to continually top each other with more violent or outrageous stunts, leading, in the end, to riots and massacres; until, at some point, the media realized that they had themselves become part of the problem. The new policy can be summed up by the *New York Times*' senior news editor, Bill Borders, who, when challenged by FAIR, a media watchdog group, to explain why the *Times* provided almost no coverage to the 2001 inauguration protests (the second largest inaugural protests in American history), replied that they did not consider the protests themselves to be a news story. Insofar as protesters were trying to make an issue of irregularities in the elections that brought Bush to power, Borders noted, the *Times* had already covered that story in great detail. The protest itself on the other hand was "a staged event," "designed to be covered," and therefore not real news.[2]

Protests, then, are basically artificial spectacles designed to influence or manipulate the media. No responsible newspaper would play along. Media executives make this kind of argument all the time. An activist, of course, would tend to respond that, if the *Times* was really in the business of ignoring artificial spectacles organized just to be covered, they would not have devoted five whole pages to the inaugural ceremonies in the first place. When one has a situation like the one in Philadelphia during the 2000 Republican convention, where upwards of twenty thousand reporters spent days trying to figure out how to fish another news story out of the minutiae of an entirely scripted ceremonial event, while largely ignoring pitched battles in the streets between police and anarchist clown blocs a few thousand feet away, the idea that media is skipping actions because they are "staged events" becomes obviously untenable.

This is anyway what an activist *would* respond if allowed access to the media. In fact, arguments like this are just the sort of thing that would never be printed if sent in as, say, a letter to the editor. In the case of the Bush inauguration, FAIR made the obvious response in its own press release:

> The *New York Times*' argument that it did not need to give significant coverage to the anti-inaugural demonstrations because it had already covered the electoral dispute in Florida is akin to saying that it was not necessary to give much coverage to sit-ins in the segregated South because the paper had already covered the Jim Crow laws the sit-ins were protesting…
>
> As for the charge that they "are staged events, designed to be covered," that could be said of almost the entire inauguration process, as well as of a large

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[2] "ACTIVISM UPDATE: *New York Times* Responds on Inauguration Criticism": news release, (February 22, 2001), Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR).

> percentage of events that the *New York Times* reports on in Washington. The difference is that demonstrations are staged by ordinary citizens, whereas the inaugurations, official press conferences, etc. that the *New York Times* prefers to cover are staged by people with access to power.[3]

In other words, it's not a question of whether a group is trying to manipulate the media for political purposes, but whether editors or media executives feel that group has the authority to do so. Events staged by politicians, officially recognized lobbying groups, or corporate executives, are normally considered newsworthy; those by protest groups usually are not (except insofar as they can be represented as a threat to public order). The media's ultimate loyalties then are to a certain structure of authority.

One reason that the news media has become so obsessed with maintaining the legitimacy of this institutional structure of authority is that they see themselves as an intrinsic part of it—as, indeed, they are. I think this is the real meaning of the first comment by Mr. Borders. Ultimately it is a question of who gets to tell the story: and the media reserves that privilege for itself.[4] Those running newspapers and TV networks feel this is their essential function in a representative democracy: to be the "responsible" (that is, only legitimate) conduit for public debate. This attitude has some apparently paradoxical effects. It's not as if mass actions have never successfully influenced the way mainstream news outlets cover stories. There is every reason to believe that they have. However, those news outlets rarely, if ever, acknowledge this influence. In almost every case, they act as if, when they change the tenor of their coverage, they are responding not to social movements, but to some gradual shifting of opinion that has taken place among those they consider legitimate opinion-shapers—pundits, columnists, public intellectuals—within the media itself. Here, the WTO shutdown in Seattle, and A16 (the IMF/World Bank blockades in Washington a few months later), are an excellent case in point.

During A16, the activist media team made a conscious decision to make an issue of "structural adjustment"—neoliberal reform packages inflicted on poor countries as a condition of loan relief, which, they argued, caused massive impoverishment, hunger, disease, and death among the world's poor. The message: we are not protesting free trade. We are not protesting globalization. We are protesting structural adjustment. At media trainings, anyone talking to the reporters was encouraged to use the term "structural adjustment" as often as possible. This kind of repetition is a classic tactic used by PR professionals—and, in fact, a number of the volunteers working with activist media teams were experienced PR professionals, who had clocked in time in the corporate publicity world. Reporters and editors, however, appear to have quickly realized what was happening, and to have made a conscious decision to not play along. The phrase "structural adjustment policy" did not end up appearing in a single news story about the protests. Reporters not only uniformly described the protests as aimed against "free trade" and "globalization" (that is, insofar as they were willing to impute a coherent position to protesters at all), editors systematically refused to publish any of the dozen-odd op-ed pieces and letters to the editor sent out by activist media teams, many written by prominent activist economists or other academics, or so much as mention the existence of the elaborate intellectual conferences discussing alternatives that always took place alongside the actions themselves. Instead, the *New York Times*, for example, on April 16 itself published three different op-ed pieces arguing that the protesters were foolish and misguided—that, in fact, globalization and free trade were the only hope for the world's poor.[5] The front page the next day covered the story of the actions almost purely from a public-order perspective, leading with what can only be called an editorial disguised as a news story by reporter John Kifner praising the police in DC for applying force in a more systematic and effective fashion than at Seattle.[6] One front-page story on April 18 actually quoted Police Chief Ramsey as saying the protests were a "win-win situation for everyone," and noted that both sides were able to declare victory: the police, because they managed to prevent protesters from shutting down the meetings, while "protesters from the Mobilization for Social Justice rejoiced that their once obscure objections to international monetary policy were now on the front pages"—this despite the statement being demonstrably untrue. In fact, nowhere on the front page of that or any other edition of the *Times* was there any indication of what those "objections" even were. [7]

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[3] Ibid.

[4] In this, perhaps, there's actually not too much difference between the way that CNN, or the *Times*, deals with protesters, and how they deal with large corporations. If Monsanto, for example, manufactures a staged event to whip up some press coverage about some new kind of genetically modified grain, media outlets will talk about the grain, but not about the event.

The fascinating thing, though, is what happened afterwards. The A16 coverage occurred during the height of the "Washington Consensus," a time when neoliberalism was still being treated as the self-evident, inevitable direction of history. Over the following months, this slowly began to change. As the "anti-globalization movement," really a global movement against neoliberal policies, seemed to be gaining momentum everywhere, governments and academics began to rethink their positions. A few prominent neoliberal economists like Jeffrey Sachs and Joseph Stiglitz broke rank, and began arguing that structural adjustment policies had, indeed, had all the disastrous consequences protesters claimed they did. Within a year or two, one began to see editorials in *Time* and *Newsweek* claiming that anti-globalization protesters had been right all along. One or two of these editorials even used the phrase "structural adjustment"; many seem to have lifted their arguments directly from activist op-ed submissions those same papers had refused to run. Clearly, these messages did have an effect. Yet one thing remained constant throughout: at no point were activists or activist intellectuals quoted, or allowed to use the mainstream press as a means to make these points themselves.

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[5] The logic, of course never stated, being that the poor do not understand what is good for them, but that rich people do—since protesters were, after all, merely repeating the demands of those in the Global South affected by neoliberal policies.

[6] "Financial Leaders Meet as Protests Clog Washington," John Kifner with David E. Sanger, *New York Times*, April 17, 2000, Section A, Page 1.

[7] "In This Washington, No 'Seattle' is Found, By Police or Protesters," John Kifner, *New York Times*, April 18, 2000, Section A, Page 1.

This seems to be a matter of policy. Media executives appear to view their role in such matters as refereeing a public debate among legitimate voices. From this perspective, anyone who attempts to disrupt public order as a way of getting their message in the paper is by definition illegitimate. It's for exactly the same reason that (to take one example with which I'm personally familiar), if someone in the audience cuts into Vice President Cheney's speech by shouting "Hey, Cheney, how much have you made off the Iraq war so far?" before being wrestled to the ground by secret service, newspapers will report that a heckler interrupted Cheney's speech with "an anti-war slogan," and then describe the resulting scuffle, but never reproduce the heckler's actual words. By the reigning editorial logic, to reproduce his actual words would be to allow the heckler to "hijack" the media; it would be morally equivalent to printing a message sent by a terrorist, and would make the newspaper partially responsible if anyone acted in a similar way, disrupting an authorized event to get a message in the paper, in the future.[8]

One can, and activists regularly do, critique all the underlying assumptions here: What constitutes order? Does not the reigning political-economic system guarantee that a small elite live relatively secure, predictable lives, and the vast majority of humans live lives of insecurity and terror? What constitutes a disruption? Does not the invasion of Iraq and deaths of a hundred thousand Iraqis constitute more of a disruption than blocking the street in front of a recruiting center? But, once one accepts the inherent legitimacy of dominant institutions, it's hard to come to any other conclusion. If nothing else, this logic helps to explain why activists before a major summit can send out thousands of press releases to just about every major news venue containing carefully worked out position papers, and still read editorials in the same papers the next day complaining that it's unclear if activists even know what they believe or what they're for.

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[8] I was about to write "breaking the law" rather than "disrupting an authorized event" but as it turned out, no law was broken. It is not actually illegal to heckle the vice president, even during the Republican convention. Eventually the heckler, who was first put in an orange jumpsuit and thrown in a cell with a notorious member of Al Qaeda, had to be released without charges—though I am told an attempt was later made in Congress to create a new law with language specifically designed to make such conduct illegal in the future.

It is important to once again emphasize that this structure of authority is not limited to the apparatus of constitutional government. Reporters or TV producers will often speak as if it is: pointing out, for instance, that trade negotiators are appointed by elected heads of state, and that no one ever elected protesters. Of course, the same objection could be raised about corporations like Monsanto—no one elected them either—and no TV news show would object on principle to carrying material from a Monsanto press release or covering its staged publicity events. But there is a reason for this too. TV networks and news magazines cannot, by definition, see profit-seeking firms as anything but legitimate voices on matters of public interest because TV networks and news magazines are themselves profit-seeking firms. To see things otherwise would destroy their own legitimacy. We are dealing then with a kind of circle of mutual legitimation, encompassing government institutions, the corporate world, and mainstream interest groups (from the ACLU to the Heritage Foundation) that engage with one another in all sorts of other ways as well. "Democracy," for the media, consists of policy debates between such legitimate institutions, carried out in relation to the shifting opinions of a massified "public" that essentially corresponds to the audience for the media itself.

Much of what I've been writing is a variation on the standard activist critique of what they call "the corporate media." Anyone who has done much press work for activist groups is well aware of how all this works itself out in practice. Statements from institutions considered legitimate are always treated differently than those that are not. During actions, this means if police at a press conference level an accusation against activists, it can be reproduced immediately by TV reporters and treated at least provisionally as true; if activists at a press conference level accusations against police, it is unlikely to be reproduced at all, in the absence of eye-witness verification from one of the reporters themselves. As one might imagine, this gives the police an enormous tactical advantage—one of which, as we'll see, they normally take every possible advantage.

As anyone who has done media work will also point out, there are very good practical reasons for all this. Reporters assigned to cover protests are usually police reporters. They couldn't continue to do their jobs without the good will of the local constabulary. Their work is in no way, however, dependent on the good will of the activist community. This is true; but it is at best a partial explanation. It is impossible to think about the role of police in American culture without entering in the domain of myth. The moment one broaches the topic, one is immediately subsumed into an endless maze of mythological imagery and preset narrative frames. For journalists in particular, there are certain stories that one tells about the police, that are very easy to tell; and it's very difficult to tell other ones.

A Word About Police

Almost every sociological study of the police in a modern world has to begin by carefully disabusing the reader of the idea that the police exist primarily to fight crime. This, they explain is a myth.

> Criminal law enforcement is something that most police officers do with the frequency located somewhere between virtually never and very rarely. The overwhelming majority of calls for police assistance are "service" rather than crime related: in an average year only 15 to 20 per cent of all the calls to the police are about crime, and what is initially reported by the public as a crime is often found not to be a crime by the responding police officer. Studies have shown that less than a third of time spent on duty is on crime-related work; that approximately eight out of ten incidents handled by patrols by a range of different police departments are regarded by the police themselves as non-criminal matters; that the percentage of police effort devoted to traditional criminal law matters probably does not exceed 10 per cent; that as little as 6 per cent of a patrol officer's time is spent on incidents finally defined as "criminal"; and that only a very small number of criminal offenses are discovered by the police themselves. Moreover, most of the time the police do not use the criminal law to restore order. In the USA police officers make an average of one arrest every two weeks; one study found that among 156 officers assigned to a high-crime area of New York City, 40 per cent did not make a single felony arrest in a year. In Canada, a police officer on average records one indictable crime occurrence a week, makes one indictable crime arrest every three weeks, and secures one indictable crime conviction every nine months (Neocleous 2000:93; see also Bittner 1990; Waddington 1999).[9]

So what do police actually do? If one goes just in terms of how police spend the bulk of their time, one can only conclude that we are dealing with a group of armed, lower-echelon government administrators, trained in the scientific application of physical force or the threat of physical force to aid in the resolution of administrative problems. Police are bureaucrats with guns.[10] They are the active face of the state monopoly of the use of violence. Hence Bittner's definition, cited earlier. Even when police are dealing with problems that seem at the furthest remove from criminal matters—say, breaking into an apartment to check on an elderly resident who no one has seen for several days, talking drunks out of bars, minding lost children—they are still dealing with problems that might require "non-negotiated solutions backed up by the potential use of force."

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[9] Most police sociologists even deny that the presence of officers on the streets, or the number of police patrols, have any significant effect on crime rates. This strikes me as ultimately somewhat implausible, but it's certainly true that police are deployed more heavily in wealthy neighborhoods that have less crime to begin with. Anyway, in neoliberal America, day-to-day security is increasingly being provided by private security agencies that don't even pretend to be providing equal protection to all.

[10] The history of police forces reveals just how much this is true. Eighteenth-century police

On the other hand, myths are important. The popular assumption that police are there to fight crime, particularly violent crime—an assumption endlessly reinforced by movies, TV shows, and news reporting—has endlessly profound effects.

Recall here what I said in Chapter 6 about the ideological effects of government regulation: how, while those regulations concerning objects like cars and buildings are enforced through the threat of violence, that violence becomes effectively invisible and, thus, makes the effect of those regulations seem almost a part of the materiality or "reality" of the object itself. Here we encounter, I think, another aspect of the same phenomenon. The police, of course, use violence to arrest, or even very occasionally do battle with, violent criminals. But they are just as capable of using violence in the enforcement of regulations that are not, technically, criminal matters in any sense of the term. Traffic regulations, open container laws, noise complaints, and unlicensed peddling are obvious examples. Police are also available if required to back up enforcement of other regulations that are not normally thought of as being part of their purview—such as, say, fire codes, or regulations concerning the size and placement of advertisements and other signs outside one's home. Normally, we never think about this. It is, as noted earlier, one of the aspects of the state that direct action tends to bring into the open. Technically, if one violates a fire code regulation, the police do have the right to come in and use all requisite physical force to evacuate the building, even against the occupants' will; this could, and in the case of squatters often does involve smashing through doors with weapons drawn and beating occupants over the head with truncheons. The same is technically true of health code violations, tax code violations, or regulations concerning the handing out of leaflets on street corners or the size and placement of signs. The difference of course is that hardly anyone is willing to risk becoming the object of officially sanctioned violence by openly defying an order to remove, say, an oversize advertisement, or trying to prevent city employees from taking it down themselves. Therefore, it is easy to forget that this is the ultimate sanction for such regulations as well.

Regulations thus blend into laws. As a result, since police are assumed to be

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were largely concerned with regulating commerce; in the nineteenth century, mainly dealing with the regulation of life among the poor, handling family crises now largely relegated to social workers, and suppressing alternatives to wage-labor employment.

enforcing "the law," any defiance of their orders is seen as essentially criminal, and, therefore by implication, violent—which means that if police do use force, even against a homeowner determined not to remove a sign, it is assumed to be justifiable counter-violence.

All this might seem a bit hypothetical and far-fetched, but, as we've seen in the last chapter, this is almost precisely what happens during direct actions. Activists are not usually guilty of anything more serious than infractions of certain codes or ordinances: for instance, regulations against walking or standing in the street. These are not criminal matters. However, when they refuse to comply with police orders, they are, indeed, attacked, and often end up with heads smashed against walls or shackled in torture positions: since for the very reason that police know activists will never be prosecuted in a criminal court, there are few limits to police behavior. So rather than the legal application of force to enforce the law, what we actually have is the largely unregulated use of violence to back up regulations, or even, simply to suppress any public defiance to the police's right to enforce them violently. This is not, however, how matters are ever represented in the media.

In fact, even my own use of the term "violence" to refer to police behavior in the paragraphs above is likely to strike many readers as oddly strident. They may be surprised to know that in doing so, I am actually employing the word in its narrowest sense: that is, in what philosophers sometimes refer to as the "minimal" or "restrictive" sense of the term, where "violence" refers basically to harmful acts committed by one individual against another. Let me take the lead from Australian philosopher Tony Coady (1986) who distinguishes three broad traditions of defining the term, each with its own political implications. What follows is my own somewhat simplified version of his typology:

> **Restrictive definitions**: e.g., "Violence is intentionally inflicting pain or injury on others without their consent." This is often said to be the version typically favored by political liberals, though Coady argues it is the closest there is to a neutral definition.
>
> **Wide definitions:** e.g., "Violence is intentionally inflicting pain or injury on others without their consent, or threatening to do so." This is often said to be the version typically favored by political radicals.
>
> **Legitimist definitions**: e.g., "Violence is harm or damage to either persons or property that is not authorized by properly constituted authorities." This is often said to be the version typically favored by political conservatives.

It's easy to see why these get the political attributions that they do. #1 is, as Coady insists, as close as one can get to a neutral definition. My version of the wider definition (#2) does not seem in itself that radical—after all, if you pull a gun on someone and demand all their money, you will normally be considered to have committed a violent crime, even if you do not actually shoot anyone. But it has very radical implications, since if you apply it systematically you would have to conclude that the state itself is essentially an instrument of violence. #3, the legitimist definition, on the other hand, actually makes it impossible for the state to behave violently (unless, that is, the state in question is deemed improperly constituted). This is obviously the definition favored by conservatives, but it is also, as activists have been complaining since at least the 1960s, the one universally applied by the American corporate media. Police operating under orders from their superiors cannot be described as "violent," even if they are breaking heads or opening fire with live ammunition. Protesters, on the other hand, can be described collectively as "violent" even if literally one in a thousand throws a rock or breaks a window. A police officer whose behavior can be referred to as "violent" is one who has already been defined as a "rogue cop"—that is, one who is acting outside the proper chain of command or legal order.

The "legitimist definition," though, is not only the one favored by journalists and social conservatives. It is the one favored by anthropologists as well (e.g., Riches 1986). This might seem anomalous, even startling, since anthropology as a discipline always fancies itself politically progressive, but this seems one of those odd paradoxes so often thrown up by cultural relativism. After all, it's hard to see how a true relativist could come to any other conclusion. If one holds that "violence" (or any other term for that matter) is simply whatever a culture or society defines it to be,[11] then one is assuming there are uniform entities that can be referred to as "cultures" or "societies," authorities that can speak for them on such matters, and some fairly dependable system whereby the outside observer can identify them. In other words, about the only thing the relativist does have to universalize are structures of authority. Starting from such a position, it would be hard not to conclude that "violence," for any given society, should be defined as any forms of hurting or damage that those authorities consider illegitimate.

Not only do relativists tend to adopt the authoritarian definition of violence; the authorities, at least in this culture, are capable of a remarkable degree of relativism in such matters. I first started noticing this during some eight hours I spent shackled in an arrest bus in DC during the IMF meetings of 2002, along with forty other activists among the several hundred who had been swept up at a mass arrest in a "green zone" at Pershing Park. During our sojourn, we spent a good deal of time in a somewhat reluctant dialogue with a police lieutenant who came quickly to be known, among the prisoners, as "Officer Mindfuck"—a man who boarded the bus, apparently, simply to entertain himself by debating us. On pretty much every topic, he took the same approach: trying to convince us we were not taking a sufficiently relativistic position. It didn't seem to be a ploy, either—at least, when he did leave the bus (to our great collective relief) the first thing he remarked to his fellow officers outside was "the problem with those guys is they don't understand there's more than one side to any question." In a world where there is absolutely no way to know whether IMF policies are beneficial or harmful, there is no basis on which to make a principled stand about anything: it does make sense that one might conclude following the rules, whatever they are, is the only possible moral course of action. And afterwards I began noticing that, whenever police were laying down the law, they treated objections in exactly the same way:

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[11] Note this assumes the term is, in fact, in some sense universalizable: that each culture does have some equivalent to the concept expressed in English by the term "violence," but that, at the same time, that there is no universal truth lying behind the term. This would appear to be factually untrue.

> [**Scene: a few days after September 11, 2001, New York. A peace march of several thousand heading towards Times Square ends up corralled on Forty-first Street. I'm trying to catch up with them.**]
>
> Cop: Move along—you have to leave the area.
>
> Me: But I'm a marshal—I'm one of the people who's supposed to be keeping the crowd orderly.
>
> Cop: A little late for that, isn't it?
>
> Me: Well, how do you expect people to behave in an orderly fashion if you suddenly come in and surround them with barricades and don't give them any way to get out?
>
> Cop: Oh, sure, you just know the only possible right answer to any question, don't you?

I've run into this sort of response again and again: the systematic agnosticism about the ultimate moral truth of a situation, the resultant faith in the ability to define it by arbitrary dictat (the difference between an "orderly" and "disorderly" crowd is essential to police procedures), and finally, the inevitable implication that anyone who disagrees is obviously some sort of ideologue or fanatic unable to adopt a sufficiently relativistic point of view.

One might proceed from here to note how different this is from the apparent relativism of activist logic—which insists, instead, that the impossibility of completely reconciling different points of view means that one should *not* impose authoritative definitions. This, though, would be to wander rather far afield. For present purposes, let me just emphasize that both the police, and the media, seem to share a number of assumptions about the nature of legitimacy, order, and violence, that cannot help but create the kind of effect described at the very beginning of this chapter: where ordinary citizens who happen to wander into the scene of the action without preconceptions of what is going on (and hence are likely to employ the first, relatively neutral definition of violence), end up with the opposite impression than those who saw the same event on the TV news. In fact, it renders classic Gandhian approaches to civil disobedience almost completely ineffective. Let me provide an example of this, before proceeding to discuss the poetics of news story construction.

On the Ineffectiveness of Gandhian Tactics in the Contemporary United States

> One thing that hit me about the cops tear gassing and shooting at us (besides the gas and bullets) was that white people all across the US were watching this happen on TV. Most of these young people are their fucking kids. They have to get it that cops will do this to ANYONE (whether or not they resist or defy the capitalism-as-god mantra we are fed at birth). They have to get it! They're not gonna put up with this! (Older, sixties-era activists tell me they will; they did back then and they will again.)
>
> —Mary Margaret Fondriest (2000)

Liberal critics who argue that anarchists protesting the WTO or other neoliberal institutions would have done better to have worked in the spirit of Gandhi or Martin Luther King are mostly unaware that in their first instinct was to do exactly that.

The essential assumption underlying such tactics, let us recall, is that since any unjust social order must rely on the threat of violence, it should be possible to, as it were, call the system's bluff: to expose the injustice by bringing out the violence inherent in the system by revealing the state's willingness to break the heads even of scrupulously principled, scrupulously peaceful citizens who refuse to obey an unjust law. Let us return to the famous image that Lynn evoked in Chapter 2: of thousands of Indian men, intent on making salt in defiance of British laws which made this a government monopoly, marching calmly up to lines of policemen who then proceeded to beat them into bloody heaps, until they were carried off and new ones took their place. It stands as a kind of epitome of this sort of procedure (as well as being a classic example of direct action). To behave in this way is to make a moral appeal: most immediately, to the men who were actually wielding the weapons, but more effectively, to the British citizens in whose name they claimed to be doing so. The message: if such a law can only be maintained by breaking the bones of obviously decent human beings, then it is not a just law and it should not be maintained.

Direct actions against neoliberal institutions, as I have pointed out, almost always operate in an essentially Gandhian framework in that they aim to expose injustices to a larger public which, it is presumed, would be outraged if they really knew about them. The problem with this approach, of course, is that this information needs to get out to the public. This, in turn, means that some of the activists' work has to be done not by activists themselves but by those journalists who will report the events. Gandhi, significantly, cultivated his own personal (British) journalist.

In order to understand the rage and passion unleashed by the Black Bloc in Seattle, one need first understand that most of the activists who participated in it were originally ecological activists, and many of them, veterans of struggles to preserve old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest in the 1990s. Many of these were organized by Earth First!, an anarchist-oriented alliance of forest activists who seem to have been largely responsible for getting large numbers of teenage urban hardcore fans and skater punks involved in forest struggles. Criticized for their refusal to condemn sabotage tactics like tree-spiking in the 1980s, they had, by the 1990s, switched to a position of pure Gandhian civil disobedience.[12] Their most famous tactic was tree-sitting: individual activists would essentially take up residence in particular trees, and stay there sometimes for many months on end, making it impossible to cut down the tree without killing them. Some of these tree-sitters won the cause a great deal of international publicity. Activists on the ground supported them with a variety of different sorts of blockades against logging equipment, starting with simple chains and gradually working their way up to bicycle U-locks and then sophisticated metal lock-boxes. All this was entirely in the Gandhian tradition of placing one's fate completely in the hands of one's adversaries. No one was permitted to take part in lockdowns, for instance, who had not made pledges of nonviolence and undergone extensive nonviolence training.

On September 17, 1998, in Headwaters Forest, an ancient redwood forest in Humboldt County, California, a logger in the employ of Pacific Lumber seems to have decided to test the waters in this regard. He sent a tree falling directly onto a tree-sitter named David Chain, killing him instantly. The initial media reaction was to treat the matter as an unfortunate accident. What follows was written by a forest activist at the time:

> I first heard about David Chain's murder on Jefferson Public Radio… First,

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[12] There's no evidence Earth First! activists were involved in tree "spiking"—planting metal spikes in tree trunks that would cause saws to break and possibly injure or kill their users. In the '80s however some trees were spiked. Those who did spike trees never did so without prior warning, and no deaths ensued, but the practice was potentially deadly and for some years Earth First! refused to either renounce or condone it. In the 1990s EF! formally announced they had come to consensus to publicly denounce the practice.

> they announced incorrectly that Chain had been killed not by a tree the logger cut, but by another tree knocked over in a domino effect. Second, after a brief and moving statement by a tearful Earth First!er, the journalist asked three basic questions. They were, in essence (I don't have the direct quotes because I was driving, and so couldn't write them down): 1) Members of Earth First! are aware that their activities are dangerous, aren't they? And isn't it true that this activist was engaged in an especially dangerous form of activism? 2) Of course the logger didn't do this on purpose, did he? 3) In the aftermath of this death, how is Earth First! going to change its tactics so this won't happen again?
>
> I almost drove off the road.[13]

In fact, activists soon produced a videotape they had taken an hour before the incident, of the logger in question (one A. E. Ammon) shouting obscenities at activists, including Chain, and warning them to clear out or he would "drop a tree" on one of them. Even afterwards, though, the media treated logging company claims that the event had been an accident as the most plausible explanation, and the local Sheriff's Department not only refused to begin a criminal investigation, but even allowed Pacific Lumber to continue logging at the site. This would have destroyed any evidence that might be used in a future investigation.

> In response, Earth First!ers set up a blockade to keep Pacific Lumber out. At last the Sheriffs had a crime they chose to deal with: between forty and sixty officers conducted a military-style dawn raid on sleeping protesters. Activists who got up were forced back to the ground. Warned by the sounds below, some of the activists at blockades closer to the murder site were able to lock themselves to logging equipment. One of the young women, Noel, was heard screaming "pepper spray" shortly after authorities reached her. She had been locked down high on a cable yarder boom. The boom was lowered, and officers then held her head back and poured liquid pepper spray over her face from a cup. A second woman was doused the same way.
>
> That night the protesters reformed their barricades, and the next morning the sheriffs were back. This time the protesters were ready, and had locked themselves down. The sheriffs wasted no time, immediately pulling out the pepper spray. Officers strung a large tarp in an attempt to keep observers from witnessing their actions, but the tarp didn't prevent people from hearing the screams of the young women being doused with pepper concentrate. Police applied pepper-soaked gauze to the activist Carrie "Liz" McKee. When she refused to unlock, the gauze was wrung out directly onto her eyes. When still

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[13] "Essay on the Death of David Chain" published in *Sentient Times* October 1998. Found at http://www.derrickjensen.org/chain, accessed July 21, 2004.

> she refused, again the police applied the concentrate. Pepper was applied a third time, and she began to vomit from the pain. Still she refused to submit, and police cut her loose from the lockdown.[14]

The use of pepper spray on activists in lockdown deserves particular attention. It had been an innovation of the Humboldt County sheriff's department a year before, when, during the fall of 1997, they were faced with a series of sophisticated lockdowns directed against Pacific Lumber and its political allies. It was first put to the test on September 25, 1997, on seven activists locked down in a circle in the lobby of Pacific Lumber Company's offices in Scotia. Police used q-tips to daub the pepper (also known as Oleoresin Capsicum, or OC) directly into their eyes to force them to release their arms from the chains without having to cut through the metal tubing. The effort was largely unsuccessful (only two of them let go), but it was repeated a week later on October 3 on two activists who had chained themselves to a logging bulldozer at nearby Bear Creek, and then again on October 16 when four young women locked themselves to a tree stump in the Eureka office of local congressman Frank Riggs, a staunch supporter of Pacific Lumber. In the latter case, the whole affair was captured on video by local TV reporters, and televised scenes of a sixteen-year-old girl named Maya Portugal, her arms completely immobilized, begging for mercy, and then screaming in agony as sheriffs applied the pepper to her eyeballs did cause something of a national scandal.

But only to a degree.

In fact, this was, if anything, even more than the David Chain case, a test of Gandhian tactics because the activity was clearly authorized by properly constituted government authorities.[15] It also fit any ordinary definition of torture. The application of pepper spray to the most sensitive tissue on a pacifist's body served only one purpose: to cause as much pain as possible in a way that would not also cause severe physical injury, so as to compel her to release the chains.[16] Or one should say: as much pain as possible, but in a way whose unfamiliarity might make it seem less obviously abusive: slowly squeezing the testicles of a male activist would presumably cause similar levels of pain, with similar small chances of inflicting permanent physical injury, but would be difficult to represent as anything but torture. The mock-medical approach employed—deputies would normally accompany the procedure with a clinical-sounding explanation of what was being done, "I will now begin to apply the pepper concentrate to the eyeball," as another deputy held back the head and held the eyelids open—was meant to make the procedure seem more palatable and scientific.

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[14] Ibid.

[15] It had been approved by the sheriff, and Chief Deputy Gary Philip had done extensive research on the possible legal ramifications.

[16] This is not to say pepper spray cannot cause long-term physical injury. Spring Lundberg, herself a victim in one of these incidents, estimates that "OC spray has been linked as a possible factor in the deaths of more than 100 people nationwide since it was approved for law enforcement use in 1992."

This approach turned out to be quite effective. Certain newspapers—notably the liberal *San Francisco Chronicle*—did quickly decry the proceedings as torture. The videos were widely shown on news programs; some prominent elected officials made statements distancing themselves from the practice. Frank Riggs, the congressman whose office had been occupied, however quickly put out an op-ed piece arguing that the protesters should not be considered nonviolent (because, he claimed, they had jostled people in his office, threw sawdust around the room, and that, when they first dropped the tree trunk, his employees thought it was a bomb) and that considering the provocation, the response was measured and justified. Faced with a dispute between constituted authority and protesters that could not be ignored, most newspapers did what they always do in such contexts: they tried to appear even-handed by staking out an editorial position somewhere in between. Where, exactly, does one draw the line between the legitimate need to enforce the law, and the rights of law-breakers?[17] Typical, perhaps, was the response of CNN: which aired the issue in the form of a "point-counterpoint" debate between liberal and conservative pundits: on the left, someone who argues that this is illegitimate police brutality, on the right, someone who argues that given the provocation, the response was justified.

The victims from the first three actions filed a federal civil rights case against the sheriff's department. Activists first tried to negotiate a settlement offering to forgo any cash settlement if police would agree to abandon the use of pepper on eyeballs, as well as to undergo nonviolence training (an interesting effort to directly negotiate rules of engagement), but this was rejected out of hand. The matter went to trial. On August 25, 1998, the trial ended in a hung jury when one juror refused to find for the plaintiffs. The presiding justice, Republican appointee US District Court Judge Vaughn Walker, therefore threw the case out of court, ruling in effect in favor of police and denying that the application of pepper spray to eyeballs constituted unnecessary force. Sheriff's department representatives later announced that, having been vindicated, they were going to use the videotapes as instructional material to show other police departments how to deal with lockdowns.[18]

All this, immediately followed by the death of David Chain, had a chilling effect on the direct action scene throughout the Pacific Northwest. Apparently, those practicing nonviolent civil disobedience could now be tortured or even killed, and neither the media nor courts were willing to stand in the way of it. Unsurprising, then, that when soon after the newly created Direct Action Network announced plans for a massive nonviolent civil disobedience in Seattle, replete with blockades and lockdowns, some ecological activists were skeptical. Granted, the majority of activists—including anarchists—signed on. But the Seattle Black Bloc was largely drawn from those who didn't—who, in fact, predicted, as a result of their experiences, pretty much exactly what actually happened: that the police would attack nonviolent blockaders, that pepper spray would be rubbed in the eyes of those locked down, and that the media would treat such behavior as justifiable. They decided to adopt a more militant approach, and many spent the next several months researching the greatest corporate economic and ecological offenders that had offices and storefronts in downtown Seattle, so as to make direct attacks on their property.[19]

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[17] Or in this case again, mainly regulation breakers, but, as always, it was treated as a matter of "law." These were not criminal affairs.

[18] Seven years later, in 2005, after several appeals, activists did manage to reverse this decision, in a settlement in which each was offered a symbolic one dollar in damages. This however was long after Seattle.

The media, of course, then took those attacks (which began many hours after police first began to use tear gas, pepper spray, concussion grenades, and batons on nonviolent blockaders) as retroactive justification for police violence, but the anarchists were probably right in arguing that they would have found some way to justify them anyway. Indeed, even before any windows were broken, local Seattle TV reporters appeared on-screen praising police for their good work even while they were rubbing pepper spray in the eyes of activists locked down at the entrance to the hotel in which the WTO meetings were taking place.

This is an important history. Still, my primary purpose here is not to explain what happened in Seattle so much as to make a point about Gandhian civil disobedience. If the idea was to lay bare a system of domination, the Headwaters Forest actions and police reaction seemed to work exactly as planned. All the connections—between corporation, politicians, and the "forces of order"—were brought into the open. Each clearly played a part in encouraging, organizing, and justifying torture and murder against obviously nonviolent protesters; evidence of this torture and murder was captured on videotape. There could be no doubt where the violence was coming from. But it could not be represented as violence for precisely that reason.

Fifty years ago, during the civil rights movement, there was a brief moment in American history where Gandhian tactics worked: the violence lying behind racial segregation was laid bare across America in terrifying images of racist sheriffs with police dogs. Perhaps this was a very particular set of circumstances: for instance, the fact that so many northern reporters saw the South as an alien country anyway. Or perhaps in the intervening half-century something has changed about the American media. Whatever the reason, this feat has not since been repeated; largely, it would seem, because those making the editorial decisions feel their ultimate loyalties are to that very larger structure of power that Gandhian strategies mean to expose.

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[19] I am passing over here the media myth that the Black Bloc consisted almost exclusively of anarchists from Eugene, Oregon who had fallen under the sway of an extreme Primitivist anarchist named John Zerzan. There was apparently a fair number of people from Eugene among them, though nothing like a majority, and Primitivist ideas have long been fairly popular among anarchists in the Northwest, but really about the only thing the Black Bloc had in common was that most were associated in some way or another with ecological activism.

Newspaper Stories and Oral Epic Composition

Half a century ago Milman Parry (1971; Lord 1960, 1991) developed a theory of Homeric epic. Many of the apparent peculiarities of the Homeric style, they argued, were really the results of the exigencies of oral composition. Their great innovation was to analyze techniques of oral composition still used in their own day by Yugoslav bards. Some of these bards were capable of improvising ten thousand lines of heroic poetry at a single sitting. Doing so seemed almost superhuman; but, in fact, they were able to do so because they could fall back on certain fairly dependable standardized techniques. One is the use of epithets: certain names are qualified, every time they appear, by standard descriptive phrases ("wily Odysseus," "wine-dark sea," "brown-haired Achaeans"). These are, in effect, dependable little bits of descriptive padding that can be summoned to fill space without really having to think about them. At the same time, there are larger standard phrases and, even more, standard scenarios or topoi (sometimes static, like the list of heroes, or the arrangement of weaponry, more often standard units of action like the parley or departure or the duel) into which one's characters can be conveniently plugged in. It strikes me that the composition of newspaper stories works on very similar principles, because news writers operate under similar constraints. While, unlike epic poetry, they do not need to follow any particular rules of meter, they are descriptions of action written for an immediate audience extremely quickly: most newspaper copy is typed in pretty much extempore, under pressure of looming deadlines, and, despite the occasional interventions of editors, never seriously rewritten before they hit the streets.

Even a cursory glance at newspaper or wire stories will reveal the equivalent of Homeric epithets: political successors, for example are invariably "hand-picked," socialist or social democratic economies invariably "sluggish," "creaky," or "sclerotic," tribal warriors or (pro-American) dictators are always "proud," political statements the author deems illegimate, are invariably described as "rambling," and so on. Anyone who reads many news reports on anarchists quickly becomes aware of these as well. A Lexis/Nexis search of US newspaper and wire stories about the Democratic and Republican national conventions in 2000 that mention the word "anarchist," for example, reveals that on only five occasions out of twenty-nine was the word allowed to first appear unqualified by any adjective or adjectival phrase (and just about all of those five exceptions were unusual usages like reported speech). Of the epithets chosen, the overwhelming majority (twelve) were some variation on "self-proclaimed" (self-styled, self-described, or self-identified), next came "black-clad" (five examples) and after that "masked" (three). Anarchists sometimes appeared in roving packs or bands. Otherwise, they could be "violent" or "hardcore" (one each) occasionally "young" or "youthful" (also one each), but that pretty much exhausted the range of possibilities. No other adjectives appeared: especially striking considering that during the two convention protests, there were anarchists involved in every aspect of the proceedings, from running press conferences to juggling fire to distributing free vegan food, many of them dressed in extremely bright colors or, occasionally, nothing at all. To go through the records of news coverage of protests in America is to see the same handful of epithets appear again and again and, perhaps even more significantly, almost no other ones.

The topoi are a bit less obvious, but it seems to me that something along these lines is clearly present too. To illustrate, allow me to shift the scene to a minor action in which I took part in the summer of 2001 in Morristown, New Jersey. The scenario was a bit unusual. There was a scandal in the news at the time about racial profiling by New Jersey police. The head of a "white nationalist" (e.g., Nazi) organization named Richard Barrett got the clever idea of announcing that, on the Fourth of July, he would read a manifesto in favor of such racial profiling on the lawn of the Morristown courthouse. He applied for a legal permit. The reason this was clever was because in doing so, he obliged the New Jersey police to protect him from the inevitable angry demonstration, and thus got to make his statement surrounded by a phalanx of police. Local anarchists involved in ARA (Anti-Racist Action) mobilized to take part in the demo, and one called NY Ya Basta! to lend a hand as well. There was a Black Bloc of maybe thirty, replete with one giant satirical puppet and several drummers and musicians, as well as a dozen Yabbas in yellow chemical jumpsuits (though without the padding or helmets).

As far as I know the event only received extensive coverage from one local newspaper, the *Bergen Record*, where a story appeared the next day.[20] I will skip to the point in the article just before anarchists appear:

> Police barricaded several blocks around the courthouse and searched everyone coming into the area with hand-held metal detectors.
>
> "I'd rather be criticized for having too much security than not having

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[20] Scott Falon and Yung Kim, "350 Cops Guard Racist Speaker," *Bergen Record*, Thursday, July 5, 2001.

> enough," said Morris County Prosecutor John Dangler. "We're not happy he's here, but the court and the Constitution allow it."
>
> The counterdemonstrators included union members, the National Organization for Women, and individual social activists. Also in abundance were self-proclaimed anarchists dressed in black and wearing bandannas over their faces.

The reader will note the typical use of Homeric epithets: actually here we have versions of the three most common ("self-proclaimed," "black-clad," and "masked") all in a row. Anarchists when they first appear in stories are almost invariably referred to as "self-described" or "self-proclaimed"; it is not clear whether the idea is to offset the presumably pejorative implications of the term (i.e., "We're not the ones calling them anarchists; these people actually call *themselves* anarchists!"), or to suggest the ridiculous pretensions of a bunch of kids who want to identify themselves with a social movement of days gone by.[21] But I suspect to ask such a question is itself inappropriate. To ascribe intention, in the hermeneutic sense, to the author—to ask, "what is he really trying to say with these words?"—is to miss the point. The author is not consciously thinking anything. He is applying the standard phrase. It seems no more possible for an American journalist to first mention a group of anarchists in such an article without calling them "self-proclaimed," than for a Homeric poet to mention dawn without also mentioning its rosy fingers.[22]

The text continues:

> Standing only a few feet from police in riot gear, several demonstrators taunted the officers. "Cops are here to defend the Nazis," one section chanted, while another shouted, "The cops, the courts, the Ku Klux Klan; all are part of the boss's plan."
>
> Tensions grew when anarchists, mostly teenagers and young adults, attempted to provoke a clash with the police by constantly pushing their way into their ranks. Although officers surrounded the counterdemonstrators, there was no violent physical confrontation.

Here is where matters become interesting. The first paragraph sets the scene with a hackneyed-sounding Marxist chant (in fact provided by a bearded point man for what must have been some sectarian group in identical yellow T-shirts) along with another that similarly implies that protesters are duped into Barrett's ploy of identifying himself with police. Then enters an element of drama. Anarchists "attempt"—though ultimately fail—"to provoke a clash"; police surround them, but no violence ensues.

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[21] Many journalists around this time would remark that anarchism was a political movement that most contemporary scholars had assumed no longer existed.

[22] Not that hermeneutics necessarily assumes an *individual* authorial intent. Any sophisticated approach to interpretation assumes an author constructed from collective ideas and practices. But this is probably not the place to delve into interpretive theory.

I have my own notes from the occasion, augmented by vivid memories. The contrast is dramatic:

> **Courthouse lawn, Morristown, New Jersey**
> ***Field notes July 4, 2001***
>
> The Black Bloc is relatively small, about thirty people with drums and flags (the puppet Evil brought was quickly retired after police threatened to appropriate it) and, unlike the rest of the demonstrators never went inside the perimeter, since that would have meant submitting themselves to police search at the checkpoints. Ultimately, they found a spot on the road just below the barricades but not far from the courthouse, and started a drum rhythm. One girl was bopping about with a black flag, others swirling around dancing. Most had long since pulled on their masks after having noticed police photographers snapping pictures from an overlooking hill. Except for a couple uniforms on the other side of the fence, the police were nowhere to be seen—at least, on the road—though there were several lines of riot cops on top of nearby hills.
>
> Our small Ya Basta! contingent had passed through the checkpoints and were on the other side of the perimeter: we were lingering nearby though, along with a small IMC contingent, in case of trouble.
>
> Then trouble came. Suddenly, police on one of the hills formed a line and marched down the slope, shields and batons at the ready, and, without making any sort of announcement, formed a line completely surrounding the Bloc.
>
> We Yabbas quickly marched out past the checkpoint to assess the situation, consulting with one Black Bloc'er who happened to have ended up on the other side of the police line. Everyone was worried the cops might be preparing a repeat of May Day 2000 in New York, when police arbitrarily surrounded and arrested another small Bloc on the basis of an obscure nineteenth-century masking law before the march even began. The police were standing stone-faced, a few yards away from us, offering no explanation.
>
> "You know there's a maneuver that I've heard about, but I've never actually seen it done," said Smokey, surveying the situation. "If the cops surround some of you, you simply form another line on the other side of their line—then, suddenly, it's them that are surrounded. Maybe we should try that."
>
> So we did. Twelve of us marched out in our yellow jumpsuits, a bit nervous, and, linking arms, formed an arc on the other side of the cops. It worked exactly to specifications. After about a minute, an order was apparently given

> to withdraw, and the police turned and marched back up the hill again, just as silently.

If we return to the newspaper story, the first thing to be noticed is that the author has juxtaposed events from very different places, and reversed events in order of time. The chanting and taunting of the police was happening inside the perimeter; the anarchists were far away in a place where no cops were around. The Black Bloc's purported "attempt to provoke a confrontation" was, when I first read it, a complete mystery to me—so much so that I immediately wrote an email to one of the authors, asking if he had perhaps got this story from a police spokesman, and pointing out that the police had in fact initiated the conflict by surrounding the activists. Remarkably, the author responded that he had been in the middle of things and was perfectly aware of the fact the cops moved first. However, he insisted, while surrounding the anarchists was admittedly an intimidating move, once surrounded, several anarchists had "bumped into officers" and that took things "a step further," so he felt his summary was justified. Now, I was there too. Neither I nor any of my companions noticed any anarchists bumping against police, let alone "constantly pushing their way into their ranks," and I am rather skeptical that this really happened. But let us assume for the sake of argument that it did. Even so, the author has still effectively admitted to reversing the order of events, making the police act only in response to a purported act of aggression by the anarchists when even he, when challenged, was willing to admit it has happened the other way around. If any anarchists did push at police lines (and note how here, as so often, the journalist has ascribed the actions of one or two protesters to the group as a whole), it was not to provoke a confrontation but to free themselves from what they had every reason to believe was a real threat of illegal preventative arrest.

What I am arguing is that it would be almost impossible for an American journalist to describe the real sequence of events. A phrase like "tensions grew when police attempted to provoke a clash with hitherto peaceful anarchists by suddenly surrounding them with dozens of officers in riot gear" simply could not appear in a mainstream newspaper in the United States—though in this case it would certainly be more accurate. To write such a sentence would be to state outright that the police were, at least at that moment, not trying to maintain order, but to provoke disorder. This would appear to violate a fundamental principle of such coverage: that the role of police is to keep order and that their behavior must always be interpreted in this light.[23] Obviously, police see their task as keeping order too, but they are capable of casting this in a much longer-term perspective whereby intimidating and even provoking conflicts with what they consider to be potentially violent elements is itself part of an order-keeping strategy. Such an attitude might be celebrated in movies and TV shows (particularly if it is attributed to individual, "maverick" cops) but such intentions cannot be ascribed to official police policy, or even to orders given by those in command.

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[23] Presumably, if one did write such a sentence, one's editor would immediately demand proof—which, since this is an ascription of intention, could only come in the form of statement to this effect by the police themselves.

Here is another account, then, that removes any explicit ascriptions of intentionality, includes the reporter's (to my mind dubious) claim that a few of the anarchists had pushed at the police, but that arranges the events in their proper sequence.

> About thirty black-clad anarchists, most of their faces masked by bandanas, gathered just outside the perimeter, dancing, drumming, and chanting anti-racist slogans as police detectives photographed them from an overlooking hill. At one point a squad of twenty riot police descended from the top of the hill and silently surrounded them, cutting off all avenues of escape. A few anarchists tried to push through their lines, but were unable to do so. Shortly thereafter, scores of demonstrators who had been inside the perimeter poured into the area. A dozen, dressed in bright yellow jumpsuits, linked arms to form a second line surrounding the riot police. The latter then retreated to their original positions and no violent physical confrontation ensued.

In fact, it is also almost impossible to imagine this account appearing in an American newspaper either (though it might, just conceivably, in a liberal Canadian one). For one thing, it makes clear that the anarchists had not actually done anything illegal before being surrounded, which means that the police doing so can't be seen as anything but an act of provocation. So this still violates the public order principle mentioned above. Worse still, it reveals that it was not the police, but the other side, who effectively defused the situation. Once again, this is a story that simply can't be told.

Of course, in the published account, the Ya Basta! contingent disappears entirely: "black-clad anarchists" are part of the standard repertory, but yellow-clad anarchists would require an explanation. So they simply drop away. But it would seem there's a standard repertory, too, for sequences of events. For small-scale actions like this, the possibilities would seem to be threefold:

1) Peaceful protest.

2) Peaceful protest; some violent elements provoke confrontation; police maintain control (respond with restraint, restore order).

3) Peaceful protest; some violent elements provoke confrontation; police

> lose control and chaos ensues (possibly including mayhem by rogue elements in the police force).

And that's about the limit of it. "Police provoke confrontation; protesters respond with restraint and defuse the situation" is simply untellable—despite the fact that, as we saw in the last chapter, nonviolence training is mainly concerned with providing activists with techniques for trying to do just that. This is why the events had to be rearranged to suggest a mounting series of protester provocations—first "taunting" the police, then trying to start a fight by pushing them— followed by a relatively restrained police response. Needless to say, if such narrative frames can cause a reporter to completely reorganize small-scale events to which they were an eye witness, they are all the more powerful when applied to a three-day mass action like Seattle, where there's so much happening at once that some sort of simplifying narrative frame is necessarily required. Hence, on December 1, 1999, CNN tersely summed up the events of the previous day:

> As tens of thousands marched through downtown Seattle, [a] small group of self-described anarchists smashed windows and vandalized stores. Police responded with rubber bullets and pepper gas [in Ackerman 2000].

As critics have observed (e.g., Ackerman 2000; Boski 2002), this has become the definitive version of what happened at Seattle, repeated endlessly in articles and TV commentary afterwards, despite the fact that it in no way describes the actual order of events.[24] In fact, it contains precisely the same operations of erasure and reversal that we observed in miniature in the Morristown story. Just as the confusing activists in yellow suits vanish in the Morristown account, so here do the overwhelming majority of those engaged in direct action in Seattle, who were in fact neither marching nor smashing windows but engaging in lockdowns and blockades. In either case, the effect was the same: to reduce the picture to an opposition between good "peaceful protesters" marching and carrying signs, and black-clad "violent" anarchists. Just as the order of events was reversed in the Morristown story, so here, police have to be represented as responding to anarchist provocation, despite the fact that—even according to CNN's own reporting at the time—police had begun using pepper spray at 10AM that morning, long before the first window was broken, and just about all eyewitnesses reported that, even after the Black Bloc went into action, the Seattle police never paid much attention to them, but concentrated almost exclusively on attacking those blocking access to the hotel.

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[24] A typical example of the way that the incident came to be reported in retrospect: "The 5,000 radical environmentalists and anarchists who descended on Seattle—aided by 15,000 marchers in a union-backed rally—smashed windows and spray-painted graffiti at top downtown stores. The situation devolved into a state of emergency that lasted for days. The police used tear gas, pepper spray and rubber pellets to quell the trouble." ("Anarchist Onslaught on Chicago," *Chicago Sun-Times*, September 27, 2002, by Michael Sneed). Here the mass of blockaders is merged into the three- or four-hundred strong Black Bloc; in other summaries, they are merged with the "peaceful protesters." In no case are they ever allowed to stand by themselves, let alone acknowledged to be the group that actually shut down the meetings.

In fact, these attacks were also the result of explicit orders from above. The day before, police commanders were filmed reassuring activists that the Seattle police had never attacked nonviolent protesters and "had no intention to start now." It was only after the meetings were shut down on the morning of November 30 that orders appear to have been given by federal officials to clear the hotel by any means necessary. By 1PM that day, then-secretary of state Madeleine Albright was calling the governor from inside the hotel and (apparently) insisting that stronger measures be used. At any rate, it was around this point that police began the systematic use of rubber bullets and pepper spray—again, not against the Black Bloc, but almost exclusively to clear pacifists from blocking access to the hotel. On the next day, President Clinton appears to have approved the decision to bring in the National Guard and escalate to the use of military grades of CS gas. All of this information is readily available in news reports published at the time, if one reads them carefully. But the rules of narrative framing ensure that, especially when the story is abbreviated, all of it disappears.

One might ask, then, what happens when a reporter is confronted with a narrative that does not fit the accepted frames, and is nonetheless determined to report it? The answer: that reporter must leave the epic mode altogether and enter a different genre, in which reporters themselves become protagonists.

This happens so rarely in the American media that to find an example, I will be obliged to switch scenes momentarily to Europe.

The Problem of Agents Provocateurs

If the preceeding analysis is correct, the guiding narrative principle of news reports dealing with demonstrations is that the police must always be represented as trying to maintain order. Police are there to keep the peace. They aim to prevent violence (implicitly defined as the unauthorized use of force). Individual rogue elements might lose control and behave differently, but police as an institutional structure must be assumed to be always trying to maintain order. The best way to test this hypothesis is to see what journalists do when police have clearly been ordered to do things calculated to provoke disorder—to encourage violence where it would not otherwise have occurred.

Sure enough, one finds such incidents are simply not reported. If street reporters try, in fact, news editors will almost invariably intervene to stop them.

During the march against the World Economic Forum in New York in February 2002, for example, police employed a tactic familiar to many experienced activists: plainclothes officers make an arrest or otherwise cause some kind of scuffle, then when others intervened, they would be arrested on felony charges of assaulting an officer. I happened to be standing next to an AP reporter when such an incident had just occurred: a plainclothes officer had, without identifying himself, grabbed a teenage girl in the middle of the march, apparently at random, and thrown her to the ground. When several other marchers gallantly tried to intervene, one placing his hand on the man's shoulder, uniforms instantly swept in to throw them to the ground, handcuffed them, and began to carry them away to waiting vans. The reporter was a sympathetic-looking, middle-aged fellow in a moustache and photographer's jacket who seemed completely puzzled by what had happened. I explained to him this was a notorious police technique.

"Oh, *that's* nice," he scowled, and started scribbling in his notebook.

Two days later I ran into the same reporter again at a press conference and he proudly informed me he had included my information in the story he filed.

"Yeah," I replied (I had read his article), "but you didn't mention that the officer tackling the woman was *undercover*. That's kind of the whole point."

"Yes, I did!" he protested.

"It wasn't in the version I read."

"Oh. I guess some editor must have cut it out."[25]

Such incidents, of course, can still be represented as anomalies. Even more difficult to talk about from a mainstream media perspective is police use of agents provocateurs: police officers assigned to disguise themselves as activists and then goad others to acts of violence in order to provide police with an excuse to attack or arrest them. Any seasoned activist is likely to know at least half a dozen stories about this sort of thing, ranging from police infiltrators who join affinity groups and then start urging them to consider the use of explosives, to unusually fat or muscular-looking "anarchists" in black masks who start throwing bottles at the police during street actions and then mysteriously disappear. It is normally assumed, in fact, that anyone who proposes actual violence in a meeting can only be a cop.

Now, there is absolutely no doubt that police have been known to employ provocateurs. The practice seems most common in Mediterranean countries like Italy, France, or Spain; more sporadic in Northern Europe and North America.

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[25] On the other hand, this particular police tactic can be used to generate stories vilifying protesters. During the Republican convention protests in New York in 2004, TV news made endless hay of the story of a police officer reportedly badly beaten by "demonic" protesters. It later transpired he was an undercover officer dressed as a biker who had driven his motorcycle directly into a crowd of working-class families.

But it certainly does occur. It is also unreportable. After all, provocateurs cannot be constructed as "rogue cops": they are police that have been assigned by their superior officers to disguise themselves as protesters in order to encourage violence. Such an action would make no sense if one's guiding assumption is that police are primarily interested in keeping the peace. To explain it, one would instead have to shift to an entirely different framework, in which police see themselves as engaged in a political contest with protesters, that they are acting on behalf of the political regime that employs them to prevent protesters from achieving their aims, and are perfectly willing to encourage havoc and even endanger ordinary citizens in order to do so. As a result, I am not aware of a single mainstream media story about a protest in America over the last five years or so that has so much as mentioned allegations about provocateurs, although it is easy enough to find such allegations in IMC reports or other activist-friendly media venues. The only example I know of where an American media source remarked on the use of provocateurs during a globalization protest was an Associated Press story from Barcelona.[26] It is worth quoting in full:

> Riot police made what appeared to be an unprovoked attack Sunday on anti-globalization protesters gathered in a city park following a midday march down a main boulevard. At least 32 people were slightly injured and 19 were arrested.
>
> Thousands of screaming and shouting demonstrators, some with small children, fled in panic as the police pushed into the crowd behind shields, wielding truncheons and firing blank gunshots.
>
> "We raised our arms and shouted, 'Peace, Peace,' but they just kept coming," said a woman who identified herself as Yolanda. The march along Passeig de Gracia and rally at the Plaza de Cataluna—along with other weekend activities—were organized to coincide with a World Bank meeting originally scheduled for this week. Officials canceled the meeting last week to avoid violent protests that have marred meetings of global and regional institutions in the past two years.
>
> The march was largely peaceful, but some store windows were broken along the route, among them a McDonald's restaurant and a Swatch store. Small groups of men and women taunted riot police.
>
> Thousands of other demonstrators joined the marchers at the park following the march. They had been peacefully listening to speakers and chanting slogans when the police swept through the plaza.
>
> The police charged the crowd after a small group of masked men and women who appeared to be police agents staged a fight at the edge of the park in

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[26] June 24, 2001.

> full view of a line of riot police standing in front of police vans. A few dozen demonstrators were pulled into the violence.
>
> "Police provoked the fight. They were part of it," said Ada Colau, a spokeswoman for the Campaign Against the World Bank, one of the protest organizations.
>
> Reporters watched as the police appeared to use the staged scuffle as bait to pull protesters into it and then use it as a pretext to charge into the park. A second charge emptied the park within minutes. The masked assailants, some of them apparently wearing earphones, had gathered in groups on the fringes of the protest march as it arrived at the park after passing down a dozen blocks of the boulevard.
>
> They were wearing knapsacks and carrying sticks, but were able to walk freely past police, pull on their masks and position themselves between the edge of the crowd in the park and the police lines 25 yards away.
>
> The fight began when one man grabbed another and pulled him to the ground. Others from the same group began kicking and slugging each other. When demonstrators saw what was going on and joined the fight, the police charged into the park. The men and women involved in the scuffle walked through the police line and boarded the vans.
>
> A reporter asked one of them if they were police. He at first said yes, and then said no, before walking undeterred by police to the vans. State television said 19 people were arrested, and the news agency Efe quoted emergency medical services as saying 32 were slightly injured with bumps and bruises.[27]

It was only because of exceptional conditions that this story could be reported at all. First of all, since the actual meetings had been cancelled, few foreign correspondents were present. As a result AP was relying, somewhat unusually, on local reporters fluent in the language and familiar with local expectations (no American reporter would have called an event "largely peaceful" if two windows had been broken in its course). On top of that there is the fact that the police provocation was so unusually clumsy, and that there was next to no attempt to cover it up: after all, how often does one encounter an undercover so stupid he will first admit to being police, and then immediately afterwards deny it? Nonetheless, to even claim that this "appears" to be a police provocation requires that a large part of the piece—the bulk of the last six paragraphs—consist mainly of evidence, and that this evidence come not from protesters or even eyewitnesses but from the reporters themselves. In other words, in order to report on such events, the genre essentially switches from mere reportage to investigative journalism, and the reporter herself becomes the protagonist. Needless to say, this requires a great deal more space than simply laying out a standard narrative, which can usually be done in twenty or thirty words, and therefore, requires an extremely sympathetic editor.

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[27] "Spain: Riot Police Seemingly Unprovoked in Attack on Protesters" Associated Press, June 24, 2001.

As it happens, this one time the use of provocateurs was acknowledged. The *New York Times* even ran a brief editorial the next day, criticizing the Spanish police for their clumsiness. Remarkably, though, the acknowledgement had absolutely no effect on future coverage. Less than a month later, during the G8 meetings in Genoa, Italian police employed almost precisely the same tactics on a much larger scale, and no American news source—even Associated Press, which had run the Barcelona story—were willing to acknowledge even the fact that protesters were *accusing* the police of doing so.

Genoa was a huge and complicated action, involving some three hundred thousand protesters, divided into a series of different blocs ranging from a large pacifist contingent, to a pink-and-silver carnival bloc, Tute Bianche (sworn to a strict code of nonviolence), and a Black Bloc (whose most militant action was to set fire to an empty building usually used as administrative offices for a local jail). Each had their own march on the "perimeter," which, as in Québec, was surrounded by an elaborately constructed fence. The police dealt with each march in more or less exactly the same way. First, a group of some twenty "Black Bloc" anarchists would appear out of nowhere, move between police and demonstrators, commit some random act of violence (overturn a dumpster, throw a few rocks or bottles at police) and disappear again. Then police would charge the actual protesters, firing extremely powerful tear gas that caused vomiting and unconsciousness, and, usually, breaking bones and causing other serious injuries with their truncheons. In some areas, especially around the Tute Bianche march, this led to pitched battles, especially when police began gassing indiscriminately in working-class neighborhoods and irate residents (who had absolutely no commitment to nonviolence) joined the fray. In one such battle, a protester named Carlo Giuliani was shot and killed by police. By the next day, classical nonviolent tactics were more or less out of the question. Some set fire to banks; police raided activist safe spaces, including the Independent Media Center, site of a notorious "massacre" when police later broke into a room full of sleeping protesters near the IMC and beat almost everyone to a bloody pulp, ultimately dragging them off and leaving the space empty but for blood and shattered teeth.

The difference between the coverage by local, European news sources, and American ones, was striking. Among activists on the scene, the main question was whether the "anarchists" in question were actual police or local fascists working in tandem with them. Both possibilities were discussed in the local media. In fact, a major drama ensued when police appear to have heard rumors about the possible existence of a CD-ROM containing a digital video of the twenty purported anarchists strolling out of a police station. Activists with cameras soon found themselves targeted; cameras were appropriated and destroyed. The next day, the police raided the Independent Media Center, systematically appropriating or destroying every bit of film or digital camera they could lay their hands on. The CD-ROM however, which did exist, was never found and was eventually smuggled into a TV studio, where it caused a minor scandal after being aired on Italian television.

No hint of any of this, however, appeared in any of the American news coverage. On the first day, the main story was that of Carlo Giuliani, who was killed in a pitched battle near where the Tute Bianche march was held up by riot police. The Associated Press, for instance, began its July 20th story on Genoa as follows:

> GENOA, Italy (AP)—One protester was killed and nearly 100 police and demonstrators injured in running battles that raged in the cobbled alleyways and broad piazzas of this ancient port city today.
>
> The interior minister said police shot the protester apparently in self-defense.
>
> In a day-long faceoff between riot police and the violent vanguard of a massive protest march, demonstrators lobbed bricks, bottles and firebombs, while police fired tear gas and powerful blasts from water cannons…

The story went on to quote Italian government and police sources and the heads of state taking part in the summit, regretting, but justifying, the protester's death, and ended with a protester talking about the gap between the world's rich and poor. Every story that appeared in the US press reverted, at least implicitly, to the "police respond to protester violence" scenario, leaving it a bit ambiguous whether or not the police had really "lost control." Reuters for example reported:

> GENOA, Italy (Reuters)—Protesters torched cars and smashed shop windows and riot police fired tear gas and water cannon during hours of rioting that erupted on the opening day of the summit…
>
> Earlier, masked protesters threw flares at police, shattered shop windows, set fire to dozens of garbage dumpsters and overturned cars and trucks, sending thick smoke billowing over the city for hours.
>
> Police fired tear gas and water cannon in a string of clashes with some of the tens of thousands of protesters around a high-security "red zone" protected by 20,000 security forces.

I ended up for a while holed up in the Independent Media Center, where as one might imagine there was a great deal of discussion over the nature of the coverage. Indymedia reporters, after all, were fanned out across the city calling in stories constantly, and, as usual, had a fairly comprehensive view of events, at least from the activist point of view. They were also continually monitoring TV coverage, wire services, and the like. The most common explanation I heard for the behavior of the international press was that reporters had been told by their editors that no statement of fact made by a protester could be printed without confirmation from at least one other kind of source (a standard which was not, incidentally, applied to ordinary citizens, let alone officials). This even applied to the IMC itself. It was interpreted so literally, in fact, that after riot police surrounded the building, and IMC reporters inside offered to uplink live video footage of the invasion as it was happening to BBC and CNN, representatives of both networks refused, explaining they weren't allowed to use the material, since they did not have a non-activist source to confirm these events were happening.

I was on the phone with an American AP reporter while all this was going on. When I started telling her about the earlier use of provocateurs, she responded with incredulity. "Well, you'd have to provide us with absolute proof of an accusation like that." When I pointed out that her own wire service had reported identical tactics just weeks before in Barcelona, she first seemed unaware, then brushed it aside as irrelevant.[28] I then tried to point out that Italian police were then under the ultimate control of an outright fascist—then-deputy prime minister Gianfranco Fini ("And this is not just some guy we call a fascist. He calls *himself* a fascist!") this was brushed aside as well. The reporter's overall position was clear. Even in a country where police were under the command of the political heirs of Mussolini, the idea that they would wish to initiate violence or chaos must be treated as inherently implausible. To level such an accusation was outrageous, and unless accompanied by absolute, undeniable, explicit proof such accusations could be dismissed out of hand. What's more, the explicit proof had to be case by case; explicit proof in Barcelona is of no bearing on the likelihood of the same thing happening in Genoa two weeks later. Meanwhile, accusations leveled by police spokesmen (i.e., the throwing of flares and firebombs, mentioned in the stories above, which appears not to have happened and was simply cited from police press conferences) could be treated as simple matters of fact unless explicit evidence was presented that they *didn't* happen. Finally, if such proof could be evinced—either that firebombs were not actually thrown at police, or that police did in fact use provocateurs—it must be produced immediately. If it is produced, say, three days later, it will be ignored since the protests are no longer a breaking story and the fact that police have been shown to have lied, or to have used provocateurs, is never considered a story in itself. This is precisely what happened in Genoa. By the time images of the phony Black Bloc coming out of the police station appeared on television stations across Italy a few days later, the US media was no longer interested. In Italy, parliamentary inquiries eventually followed, and these inquiries did receive some passing mention in a few US newspapers; but, even in those stories, revelations about provocateurs were never considered newsworthy.

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[28] Newspapers and wire services often intentionally send reporters with little local knowledge to cover international events, on the grounds that they are likely to provide a perspective their readers feel comfortable with.

In other words, not only are there fixed narrative frames, but stories like Barcelona, where reporters shifted to investigative mode, cannot in themselves contribute to changing those frames. I don't think this is entirely due to bias. Or, perhaps, one should say, insofar as there is bias, it is not so much personal as structural. Reporters, as individuals, vary a great deal in their politics. Many can be quite sympathetic with activists on the issues. But then the same could be said of individual police. The point in both cases is that individual opinions are not really that important; both police and reporters are operating within an institutional structure that renders their opinions irrelevant. If they are not sitting in lonely cubicles dashing off formulaic reports for deadlines, if, for example, they are writing about a major event, their stories are likely to be working in teams, their stories rewritten by editors; TV spots are even more collective products; the narrative frames are the one thing familiar and accepted by all. In either case, this means that the story of an action has, to all intents and purposes, already been written before the events take place. To tell a different story requires strenuous efforts and fortuitous circumstances, and, as soon as those circumstances end, everything snaps back to where it was before.

SECTION II: ANARCHIST RESPONSES

Many activists would argue the proceeding analysis is too generous to journalists. Structural constraints do certainly play a part; but it's also true that sometimes reporters lie. This is a legitimate point. Most of us, I find, and social scientists particularly, are reluctant to acknowledge the importance of self-conscious deceit in human affairs.

This becomes particularly obvious when looking at the behavior of news outlets whose politics are most hostile to a protests' message. I will limit myself to one example. On the eve of the 2004 Republican convention in New York, the staunchly Republican *New York Post* ran a piece warning of dangerous anarchists preparing to descend on the city. The list consisted mainly of friends of mine, and contained many statements that can only be described as outrageous lies. Prominently featured was Jaggi Singh, the CLAC spokesperson who the reader will probably recall from the introduction, along with a photograph of someone who looked vaguely like him practicing at a firing range. The text made reference to his arrest in Québec City, noting that he was charged with possession of a giant catapult that was used to shoot stuffed animals at the police. The whole point of the stuffed animals, of course, was to make this kind of scare story look ridiculous. No one could possibly hear a story about anarchists whose most elaborate weapon was a teddy bear and come to the conclusion that they posed a genuine threat to public safety. The *Post* reporter found a simple way to get around this dilemma: he just changed "used to fling stuffed animals at police" to "used to fling flaming stuffed animals at police."

No one, and certainly not the Canadian police, had ever suggested the stuffed animals shot from the catapult in Québec City had been set on fire. Neither is there any reason to believe the author somehow managed to convince himself that they had been. He just made it up. He lied. After all, there was no practical reason not to. Anarchists, as a constituency, have next to no political clout as far as the media is concerned. There are no politicians willing to take up their cause, they have no institutional supporters, there is no need to maintain good relations with them as sources of information, they have no influence over advertisers, and no matter how much you slander them, they can be pretty much guaranteed not to sue. The author probably figured that anyone willing to actually call himself an "anarchist" was effectively asking for this sort of treatment.

This is, of course, another version of the by-now-familiar problem of creating autonomous spaces. As I've pointed out, one cannot do so without also refusing to seek the support of mainstream institutions. Therefore, the main way one is likely to come into relation with those institutions is in the form of the police. When police encounter people who systematically refuse to recognize their authority, they tend to attack them. Violence is intrinsically newsworthy. There are, however, virtually no institutional constraints against a member of the media who wants to claim the anarchists are violent, and quite a number of institutional constraints against any who wish to claim the same about the police.

Obviously, not all activists are anarchists, and mass mobilizations in particular tend to bring together participants with a wide range of attitudes and philosophies. Even among anarchists, attitudes towards the corporate media vary. Probably a majority flat out refuse to speak to them. Many take part in Indymedia, one of whose best-known slogans is, in fact, "Don't Hate Media. Become the Media!"—really the only solution consistent with the principles of direct action. Activist media, as we'll see, have managed to totally transform the experience of taking part in actions. At least for participants, they are profoundly democratizing and de-alienating: where once one was ignored or vilified, suddenly, each activist not only has access to immediate sympathetic accounts over the Internet, but knows at every moment that they can, if they want, become a full participant in telling the story of their own deeds. As a tool of practical de-alienation, and aid in self-organization, Indymedia transformed everything.

The problem was outreach. While at its peak—for instance, during the actions in Genoa—Indymedia web pages were getting more hits than CNN, outside the Internet there's simply no comparison. Ultimately, network news, cable news, and newspapers reach most Americans, and Indymedia basically operates within the greater activist community. To reach out to larger circles, it was very hard to avoid dealing with the corporate media, no matter how strongly they stacked the cards against you. Hence, at any large action, there was likely to be an activist media team, with a phone bank and runners on the street, organizing press conferences and otherwise doing their best to fight the battle of spin against police and politicians. I've taken part in several such teams, notably during the Republican conventions in Philly in 2000 and New York in 2004, and my experience has always been that other activists treat the project with great ambivalence. Many think the project is a betrayal of basic principles; others avoid activists who liaise with the reporter as systematically as they do the reporters themselves. Yet others condemn anyone who would presume to speak for "the movement" or other anarchists. Almost invariably, too, debates ensue on whether it might be possible to actually conduct direct action *against* the media. Such debates tend not to go anywhere—the problem then becomes what would be the point since media actions are (unsurprisingly) the one sort of action guaranteed never to receive coverage, and so on.

Rather than describe these debates myself, maybe it would be better to allow the reader to follow one group of activists as they hashed such issues out. Let me return to New York Ya Basta!, and a conversation already summarized in Chapter 1, at a meeting in the weeks leading up to Québec. NYC Ya Basta! was a group caught in an unusually profound dilemma in terms of media strategy. The rhetoric of Italian Ya Basta! was all about visibility, about providing a public (if anonymous) spectacle as the face of all those who media and political machines make vanish, particularly at global summits: the poor, clandestine immigrants, the populations of the Global South. They did not claim to speak for the excluded, but they did mean to remind everyone that they exist. As a result, they became masters of attracting press attention, and many European anarchists dismissed the whole group as a media stunt. The New York group contained a number of activists who agreed strongly with the critique, for whom the main appeal of Ya Basta!'s tactics was simply that padding and elaborate protection provided a more "proactive" and mobile alternative to lockdowns. Even for those not averse to trying to play the media, there was the question as to how. There had been virtually no discussion of the negotiations over the Free Trade Areas of the Americas Act (FTAA) in the US. The government appeared to be pursuing a deliberate policy of avoiding public debate. Everyone was talking about what to do about the "press blackout." A large action seemed unlikely to change this. Compared to its European counterparts, the US media was much more likely to describe protests simply as a security issue and much less likely to give protesters any sort of platform to describe what they thought they were doing. In Italy, Ya Basta! spokespeople appeared regularly on TV. In the US, anything like this would be inconceivable. The question, then, was how, under conditions of a general blackout, to play on the politics of visibility.

To give readers a brief reminder of the dramatis personae: Smokey, Emma, Tim, and Flamma, were part of a collective known as the Babar the Elephant Battalion, normally suspicious of any form of mass organization; Moose, Laura, and Betty were coming at things largely from the perspective of Italian Ya Basta!; Jackrabbit was an activist with New York's Reclaim the Streets; I was then, with Laura, acting as "Minister of Propaganda"; Sasha, a professional videographer, first came to Ya Basta! to make a documentary film about it, and eventually became an active member.[29] As the conversation opens, we've been discussing action scenarios: no one was much interested in a purely defensive action (like SalAMI's idea of defending a distant autonomous space). Smokey, among others, had very mixed feelings about concentrating on simply pulling down the wall; but, if we were going to pass through to the other side, then the question became: to what purpose? Some of us had been in contact with a Québécois activist who operated a homeless shelter inside the perimeter, who was complaining how difficult it was becoming for him to operate his establishment now that volunteers were not allowed in. One idea was to try to march through in order to go there and help out; that way, we could explain that the helmets and padding were simply what it took to be able to volunteer to work in a homeless shelter in this town. But then the question was: explain to whom? Presumably Indymedia would cover the story, and conceivably one or two activist-friendly venues like *Frontline* or *Democracy Now!* Otherwise, even if we just tried to walk through a breach in armor, we'd be represented as scary militants "attacking" the police. Another idea was to do something with the shields: turn them into giant posters, each with images of the excluded, each engraved with a message to be delivered to the assembled heads of state.

Thursday, March 8, 2001
Ya Basta! Meeting, Manhattan (in medias res)

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[29] Normally I have not been citing direct quotes from smaller meetings like this, not open to the public. However, this particular meeting was being filmed by Alexis for his documentary, and everyone involved had agreed to this.

> Smokey: …or, alternatively, instead of the shield thing, one idea might be to do some kind of rhetoric about the voice of the voiceless. We could interview some of those people most made to vanish and ask them, "What would you have to say to the FTAA."
>
> Flamma: Oh, you mean record their statements, and then blast them out somehow?
>
> Someone: But the problem is again who will know? Who'll even be able to hear it?
>
> Betty: We could simulcast it through Indymedia.
>
> Smokey: Or we could even try to kidnap the corporate press. Say we were to blockade them, for instance, tell them: "Once you play this, we'll move on." I'm not saying that's the only thing we'd do, or that we'd build our strategy around it—but it could work as one potential action, one element of our strategy.
>
> Someone: That's hardcore.
>
> Jackrabbit: I don't see why all this is necessary. It's possible to get press, even good press. RTS does it all the time in New York.
>
> Someone else: Yeah, but RTS puts on small specific actions with just one message, easy to explain, and that no one can possibly describe as violent.
>
> Jackrabbit: Hey, the FBI has RTS listed as domestic terrorists!
>
> Someone: Yeah, but that's because they're idiots. On the other hand, it's not like we're really talking about exactly *kidnapping* the media, are we? We're essentially trying to negotiate with them…

The conversation then turned, for a while, to the niceties of words like "kidnap" and "negotiate." Media folk would definitely think of this as "kidnapping"—they would probably do anything in their power to prevent this sort of thing on principle. And what sort of message could we possibly come up with that would seem legitimate in this context? About the only thing that would work is something that no one could possibly disagree was relevant but that the press refused to cover: for instance, force them to read out the full text of the draft FTAA agreement, or at least selected passages. That would make a nice irony, but it would mean jettisoning the whole idea of conveying the voice of the voiceless.

> Moose: Well, let's think about this idea of kidnapping the media—or doing some sort of direct action against the media, anyway. I like the idea of not just licking the asses of the media like usual, but actually going after them, holding them accountable somehow. But how would it work? Say we get through. We're past the wall. What kind of scenario are we looking at? What is there to actually blockade?
>
> [*all eyes turn to Sasha*]

Sasha: Well, let me see. They probably won't have a press tent. Probably the media center will be inside the conference hotel, though usually they put it in the basement or in some annex. The big outfits will have stringers out with the protesters, probably more photo than video people. Most of the video crews will be inside the hotel covering the summit. The press area will be full of tech people, lots of big burly union guys, who may or may not be sympathetic. There'll be cables running all over the place, running out to the satellite link-ups. Pull the plugs and they're pretty much cut off. If the center actually is a tent then the cables will be really easy to spot. But either way we'd have to get past the wall before we can even start thinking about any of this.

Emma: But you're saying the bulk of the press will be inside the wall.

Smokey: I don't know about that. In Philly, there were anchor people, CNN people, right there on the streets next to us. During J20, they were a stone's throw away even during the battle at Naval Memorial: at one point I saw Maria Shriver practically three feet away from me. The media aren't afraid of us. The question is how to use that to our advantage. What we're talking about here is sort of outside the box. We feel more comfortable going versus the police (who are also big burly, union guys incidentally), but I don't think this is really all that different.

Jackrabbit: But you can say police are *only* our enemy. With the press we don't know—it's all a matter of what spin they decide to put on it. We'll only really have any idea about that when we start seeing the coverage that evening, or more realistically, by day two.

David: I don't know, I think you could make an argument that as an institution, the media is as much part of the power structure as the police. At least that's true of the people who are calling the shots in either case. Look at the election: every pundit immediately started saying the same thing—it doesn't matter who really won the election, it doesn't matter if the Supreme Court was flagrantly partisan, our job is to make sure people don't lose faith in American institutions. We need to uphold authority. Then, three weeks later, I hear on CNN that Bush is going to his first big party in the Washington elite social set, and his people are all nervous whether people will treat him like a legitimate president—and whose party is it? That woman (what's her name?) who owns the *Washington Post.*

Someone: Katherine Graham?

David: Yeah, that's it. They're all totally in bed with each other. At the top aleast. They're basically the same thing.

Moose: Let's talk more about the media. We talked a little about this when Anton [a Tute Bianche from Finland], was here, and I've been reading some of the material on the Internet, the post-Prague reflections about media coverage.

My impression is the Italians at least, they're very self-conscious about what they're trying to do. They're trying to create a myth. A kind of new heroic Subject that's also simultaneously a self-satire, and that completely subverts conventional distinctions of violence and nonviolence. Now, I don't know if we have a consensus on this—probably there couldn't be—but: okay, just picture this. We have these large very brightly colored people with silly costumes, with balloons, with ladders, kazoos… It's like suddenly the action gets invaded by a bunch of cartoon characters. I think we can guarantee the media will be on us like flies. How they'll frame us is a whole other thing. It seems to me that all depends on what happens around us. But it will give us a little window, an opportunity to get our message out.

Betty: Wait, I'm confused. So we're not trying to do direct action against the media any more?

David: I just don't think they will cover the message no matter what we do. They'll just cover the costumes. Though, one idea I've been kind of bouncing around would be to make a shit list. I mean—do what the government does, the big players, when they deal with the media. They use carrots and sticks: if a reporter gives them sympathetic coverage, they'll provide more leaks or information; if a reporter offends them some way, their sources dry up. We can't do that because those few anarchists who will talk to reporters will talk to all of them equally. But what if we tested it out: if some media outlet actually does convey our message, or just gives us a sympathetic notice, we reward them with exclusives. If they tell some flagrant malicious lie, then we either refuse to speak to them, or make it clear that there are consequences.

Laura: How, exactly?

Moose: Pie them!

Flamma: Yeah, pie the camera!

Smokey: But what's the message in that?

Flamma: That it's fun?

Smokey: No, seriously. We want to get our message out—we're living in a press blackout. How will that help us break out of it?

David: Yes, that's true. Probably it won't. It assumes they will at least be covering us.

Jackrabbit: Anyway, we're represented as a bunch of hooligans already. We're going to make it *easier* for them to do so?

David: The weird thing about that is that it doesn't always take. Remember Philly? I saw a survey taken a few days later asking TV viewers how they felt when they saw the protesters on TV, and… I don't remember the exact numbers, but a majority of them were sympathetic and the largest single chunk, like thirty percent, we made them feel "proud"—this despite the fact that we *only* got hostile TV coverage in Philly. All they talked about was violence, but people were proud of us anyway.

Moose: You see, that's what I'm talking about too. Wouldn't it be perfect if everybody watching TV would be seeing an image of us on the screen and then they caption it "violent protesters"—and people will take one look at it, and say, "Wait! That does not compute."

Laura: Yes, people won't know how to categorize us. It ties in with what that Finnish guy the other day was telling us about the beginnings of the Tute Bianche; remember, how for the first big action, they didn't use shields, because of how the media would cover that? The whole idea was to get across the message that we're protecting ourselves, we don't want to get hurt, but we're not going to hurt anyone else either. Obviously, if the cops see a shield, they're not going to interpret it that way. They're going to think they're looking at some kind of warrior. So will the media. So the question became: how can we head that off? How can we be proactive? That's why they started doing things like holding up inner tubes instead of shields, or wrapping themselves in rubber-ducky flotation devices.

Moose: Yeah, inner tubes look really good, because they're so soft and fluffy. Remember those pictures from [the WTO action in] Cancun: ten guys coming down the beach holding out inner tubes wrapped in paper-mâché; you couldn't possibly hurt anyone with any of it no matter how hard you try. It all looks very cute and unaggressive.

Laura: Things don't look the same in Europe as they do here. The only reason the Tute Bianche could march up to Prague looking like legionaries with the shields and big sticks was because by 2001, people had become used to the idea, they understood something of the philosophy, they knew these people really wouldn't hurt anyone. It took years of media work to build up to the point where we could carry sticks.

Moose: What was it, five years?

Laura: And it needed constant work: before every article there were actions, media stunts and press releases, interviews...

Moose: Whereas we, we're only four months old here. I think it's okay to take it slowly. It's okay for us not to use shields. At this point, I think it's just as important to build a movement than to get out a message.

Emma: Now, wait a minute. I think I disagree with the entire premise here. If we don't use shields, it seems to me, that's got to be a tactical decision, based on the tactical situation—not based on how we think it's going to look on TV. We're doing a direct action. Not a media stunt. How we think it looks on the corporate media should *never* be the primary reason for making a tactical decision.

Laura: Well, we do want to be covered by the media, though? We're experiencing a blackout. That's one of our basic problems.

Moose: Let me make it clear: I agree with the analysis that says we should treat media as the enemy, like cops. But that doesn't mean we have to ignore them. We don't ignore the cops either. At the very least we have to react to them. So why can't we think of this as basically the same thing?

Jackrabbit: Sure: we organize around what we think the cops are going to do. That's why we carry shields to begin with. Because we think it's likely the cops are going to try to hit us. So, if the media's there, by that same logic we have every right to anticipate what the media is likely to think about the shields—which, by the way, it isn't a foregone conclusion that'll be a negative, is it? For all we know, shields might even look good to some of them.

Mark: I don't know why we're even arguing about this. Can't inner tubes do the same thing just as well?

Jackrabbit: Well, I think it's more a conceptual point. A question of passive versus aggressive. I'm saying, I don't know why we necessarily have to look either. What's wrong with just being proactive?

Laura: Actually, the problem with inner tubes is that it's hard to hold them without exposing your fingers. Then the cops go straight for the fingers. It's the same thing with banners. We had a lot of broken fingers early on. Inner tubes are a problem unless you're wearing some kind of elaborate padded gloves, and then it's hard to grip them.

Moose: Remember, we're only going to be about fifty people. Maximum. That's not exactly an army. We're not going to be able to do all that much by sheer weight of numbers, but we do have some advantages. We're weird. We're visually striking. No one on this side of the ocean has seen anything like us before. So we're a potential news story. We'd be idiots to throw that away.

Sasha: Speaking as someone who's worked with the media for most of my working life, I think you guys are being a little naïve here. The media will do what they want even if we all come out in fuzzy bear suits. We all know how these stories read. You get your typical six-paragraph piece; they'll lead with violence if there is any, if there isn't they'll say something about the "carnival atmosphere" but nothing about the message. There'll be a little trivializing humor, then cut to some official spokesman saying how confused we all are and if we have any objections to the treaty, they're already taking care of it. I'm more on Emma's side here. Let's take our message directly to the people who make decisions and force it on them. Forget the media. Fuck 'em.

Smokey: I don't accept the dichotomy. It's possible to appeal through absurdity. Bigger, more organized groups do it all the time. Or look at the Clowns in Philly—they were really effective in the streets, even if they didn't get any media coverage. Plus remember: all of this is going to be happening in Canada. The media there is a lot less monolithic. They have their process, just like we have ours, but we can interrupt their process and make them change.

Or, we could think of that as one possible option. There are other options. We can try to circumvent them via Indymedia. Or a third option: try to get an undiluted image and message through, unedited. Try to proactively take over; dominate it, take over for a day, interrupt their process. We can storm a station, or if we want to be less aggressive, maybe, substitute newspapers, use hackers to substitute our message on their web pages. We'll be called thugs, yes, if we do so, but they'll say that anyway—they'll say the same thing if we tear down the wall. Maybe the soft underbelly of the beast on this day will be the media, not the FTAA.

Flamma: Or the cops.

Smokey: The likelihood of joining a bloc and disrupting the FTAA meetings is pretty small. They've been preparing for us for six months. It's possible we could do it, but *this*—this they've never prepared for.

Laura: I agree completely, but I don't know if the emphasis should be on the media. I mean, that it should be the center of our action.

Jackrabbit: I agree. All this stuff about media—doesn't our media strategy have to depend on what we're trying to do? Or are we just going to attack the media for the hell of it? Because I seriously doubt that anything short of holding a gun to their head is going to get them to air some statement they don't want to air. That's just not going to happen.

David: I think the media is a perfectly legitimate strategic target. After all, when there's a coup, what's the first thing they always do? They try to seize the radio or television station. Obviously, there's a reason for that.

Flamma: And I don't think they're prepared for it.

David: But Jackrabbit is right: the question is how, and to what effect? I guess some of that is technical questions. Like, is there a way to jam their feeds?

Emma: I just don't think concentrating on media is what Ya Basta! should be doing. I'm going to Québec because I believe in direct action. That means I want to be able to directly confront our rulers; not to appeal to the media to deliver a message, or even to force them to. After all, what's Ya Basta! all about? I joined because it seemed more proactive than lockdowns. But it's a direct action strategy, not a symbolic gesture, not a way to influence the press.

Flamma: I agree but think you're missing a crucial point. We have a setup. There are players; media, cops, delegates. They have a process. We want to throw in a monkey wrench. So we have to ask ourselves, which is the weakest point? Seems to me causing a media blackout—on their side—would actually be just as effective as putting our message out on it (which I agree with Jackrabbit seems pretty unlikely).

Sasha: I'm going to contradict myself, which is fine.

Moose: Hell, I've already contradicted myself at least twice now.

Sasha: All right: so, let's say the media is the tool of state power. It's another arm of the beast or anyway, as you say, the soft underbelly…

Jackrabbit: Um, you realize that's a logical contradiction?

David: Philosophy majors! Let's say: "tentacle." Go on, Sasha.

Sasha: …anyway, it gets in our way just like the cops. So, we can treat it as analogous. I'm skeptical we can actually pull it off, but it's worth considering. And if some object, well, maybe we should talk about diversity of tactics *within* Ya Basta!

Jackrabbit: In terms of Emma's objection, that taking on the media isn't direct action: I think, if we could take over media, that would be entirely in the spirit of direct action. We just have to figure out how. Spin is another issue: how to make it impossible for them to say we did something violent and horrible to them. Kidnapping a media station might work: in the sense of finding one of their trucks abandoned and just using it ourselves, defending it, using nonviolent tactics, from the cops who try to recapture it. Use their own tools against them. I could conceive of something like that happening, if we really have people with the technical knowledge to operate the equipment.

Someone: Oh, that's easy. I know half a dozen Indymedia geeks who can handle a satellite uplink, no problem.

Jackrabbit: Then there's a question of how to make a statement they can't say is rambling and crazy and illegitimate. That's very hard. But maybe not impossible. Say, for instance, the Mohawks want to make some sort of statement to the world.

David: I like it too. Look, a lie is a kind of violence. Especially when it's used to make it possible for the cops to beat people up, or the IMF to literally take the food out of the mouths of babies. We just have to figure out a way to do it where we won't look like a bunch of wingnuts.

Tim: I think it's a good thing, as David says; but I think we should go after the strong part, the wall, first. If we can do that, the media will follow. Not that we should discount a media action either.

Moose: I'd be totally down with… well, if a hotel where the media is, I'd be for shutting it down and all that. Or taking over a media station. But that ratchets up a lot of stuff—if we all get arrested, that'll drain a lot of energy. Let's assume we get through to Québec: I think it's more interesting on the first day, to take demands to the meeting, a petition or something, then maybe on the twenty-first we can do a media action if we're not in jail.

It later turned out that similar conversations were going on in spokescouncils in Québec City at the time: even down to many of the details, such as the possibility of blockading media outlets to try to force them to air prepared tapes. Nothing ever came of them. Aware, in the end, they would have been necessarily self-defeating, they went the way of most flawed activist projects: faded away for lack of anyone willing to commit time to them. More plausible scenarios were too technically difficult. In the end, about the closest anyone came to an anti-media action was when someone smashed the windows of a couple of TV vans parked near the main entry through the wall; an act which the van's owners probably assumed was nothing more than random apolitical vandalism.

Collective Representation (Becoming the Media)

The typical anarchist reaction, as I've said, is to avoid such traps entirely by relying on alternative media. There's no real room here to go into the details of the creation of the Indymedia network—which certainly deserves a very long ethnography of its own—but I do think it's crucial to emphasize the difference activist media has made in the experience of participating in protests and direct actions for the activists themselves. This is really inestimable. The mere fact that any action, no matter how small, will inevitably be accompanied by at least one friendly print reporter, one photographer, one videographer, already has an enormous impact on the quality of the experience.

Veterans of protests and actions in the 1980s and 1990s often say the most frustrating thing about them was the feeling that, however much care, planning and energy might go into carrying them off, afterwards—unless the action was extremely large, or one happened to be very lucky—it would be as if the entire event never happened. It left no traces. Or, to be more accurate, it left only a paltry few. A few photographs pasted to a bulletin board, or distributed amidst friends. Xeroxed leaflets, or other such relative ephemera. Perhaps a clipping from a neighborhood newspaper, usually somewhat dismissive in tone. More likely there would be no printed coverage at all. The sudden appearance of web-based Indymedia, alongside activist listservs, after Seattle meant first and foremost that even the smallest action would receive sympathetic coverage from *someone.* One could attend a rally or a Critical Mass ride in the afternoon and log on that very evening and read an account and look at photographs of the event, or else wake up the next morning and find a newspaper or wire-service style report on the event waiting in one's inbox. Rather than an experience of isolated events tumbling into obscurity, one had the sense of, in one's own small way, having contributed to making history. There was an indelible and presumably permanent record; it would be available to future historians and someday find itself discussed in books and seminars (many activists are quite sure of this, and ready to remark on the possibility). If the action was in any way important, one could also be sure these stories and images were also appearing, that very moment, on activists' computer screens in Bolivia and Denmark. There was, suddenly, an international community of like-minded radicals—the very people whose opinions one cared about the most—who were sure to know what one had accomplished. Activists' sense of relevant time and space was thus instantly transformed.

This sense of the immediate creation of history has become a large part of what makes such events inherently less alienating experiences than they used to be. Crucial here is the fact that Indymedia reporters are telling the story in at least something like the form in which activists experienced it. The reader can well imagine how a participant in the Morristown action described earlier—who had taken part in the clever maneuver that dispersed the police, and went home feeling rather effective and proud of herself—might feel if she not only had to read the piece in the *Bergen Record* the next day, but also know that was the only record the rest of the world would ever have of the event. Ten years earlier it almost certainly would have been. Now, there was not only an Indymedia article likely to appear, but in a web format that would allow one to point out any perceived errors, add one's own anecdotes, and otherwise provide one's own perspective and experiences—which, unless the web discussion dissolved (as it sometimes did) into quarrels and vituperation, ensured one could not only make history, but play a part in establishing the historical narrative that would appear immediately afterwards.

This latter point is crucial. Indymedia sees itself as a participatory news source. Stories are supposed to be written by participants. In principle, it aims to completely break down the division between journalists and public. While in practice this is often more an ideal than a reality (some activists are exclusively Indymedia journalists, and appear at actions explicitly as reporters and almost never in any other capacity; community activists are much more likely to call in an Indymedia reporter than to send in a piece themselves), if nothing else it means that activists are aware that they could provide their own report if they really wanted to. Or even, for that matter, show up at the editorial meeting where coverage of a larger action was being discussed. In fact, they could, and some do, participate in any aspect of the production process: from putting on an action, for example, to filming it, editing the film, and producing the eventual video. Normally, after a major action, the Indymedia spaces quickly fill with activists, sometimes coming to help out, sometimes to get information, sometimes just to be able to watch the rushes or raw footage, as it comes in, of what they were doing on the streets only a few hours before. The production of the event and the production of the story of what happened end up becoming part of a single, collective project, shared by all concerned, in which participation is limited only by how much time and energy one is willing to invest.

This sense of collective production recurs on every level of representation and communication in the process of putting together and carrying out an action. Props and costumes are made collectively. Even collective discussions or dissemination of information carried out in the middle of a street action are done in a way to implicate everyone. For instance: when holding an open meeting in the middle of an action—to discuss, for example, whether to abandon a position or barricade—each speaker will address the multitude, carefully spelling out each phrase or sentence of what he has to say, pausing at the end of each to allow everyone there to repeat his exact words back to him, as a kind of vast, collective, echoing chorus. When I first witnessed this kind of call and repetition at A16, I assumed that it was owing to the fact that, with all the wind and ambient noise, this was simply a way to ensure everyone would hear. Eventually, I came to understand this was at best a secondary consideration (and anyway it didn't work all that well). Really, the point seemed to be to make sure that every speaker was keenly aware of the gravity of what they were saying—often, despite appearing to make discussion far more time-consuming, it had the opposite effect, since everyone was weighing their words so carefully, and cutting out everything extraneous—and, perhaps even more important, making the entire process somehow collective. It echoed, in fact, the experience of chanting slogans—at least, in the newer, more anarchistic forms of chanting, where anyone could start a new chant at any given time, and suddenly see their words repeated by hundreds, even thousands of people, only to fade away and be replaced by a new chant put forward by another activist, somewhere down the line, which would, in turn, render them again part of the impersonal chorus. This sort of thing is very much in contrast with the more familiar, traditional style of the chant leader with his microphone. In anarchist marches, anyone can start a new chant, or even make one up, and there's a constant ebb and flow. The effects I think are quite profound. Durkheim (1912) wrote about the effect of ritual chants and songs as effacing oneself of individuality. The sense of producing words of which one is not oneself the author, simultaneously with hundreds of others chanting exactly the same thing, provides the most immediate and powerful experience of sociality: it's that moment where society, normally an abstraction, is actually present to its members as an immediate concrete reality of which their body is a part. Political chants have much the same quality. Most have no known origin—like jokes or proverbs, they just somehow preexist, tracing back to some collective authorship. They literally speak through you. Durkheim and Mauss themselves saw this sort of evocation of "mechanical solidarity" as appropriate to relatively primitive forms of society: Mauss was horrified when he saw similar techniques used to political effect in fascist movements of his day (Gane 1992; see Bloch 1974).

From a Durkheimian perspective, then, the experience of taking part in an autonomous march—in which anyone can try to start a chant, or improvise a new chant, and then, if it catches on, experience their own individual initiative suddenly become a moment of collective dissolution of individuality, as all speak in a collective voice, then follow along as others start new ones—is a kind of democratization of effervescence.

True, one still does sometimes find events with chant leaders and followers; but in the newer styles of protest, at least, it almost never takes the form of a leader with a megaphone. The night before a rally against a sweatshop or bank, for instance, there's likely to be a meeting to try to brainstorm new chants appropriate to the occasion, but the results are usually handed out on sheets to everyone. This attitude accompanies a general distaste for chants that seem like they've been around forever, and that exhibit a tiresome lack of imagination: especially the notorious "hey ho, hey ho, [whatever it is] has got to go," which has served as a generic default for protest marches since at least the 1960s. Very old songs, particularly those from the 1920s and 1930s, are often popular: teenage anarchists performing a vigil for arrested comrades have no trouble singing "Solidarity Forever." But aside from standards everyone knows to use in specific circumstances ("The Whole World is Watching!" or "Whose Streets? Our Streets!"), chants are valued for their creativity. Insofar as there are specialists, anyone who takes a role in any way analogous to the leader with the microphone, they almost always make a point of making themselves somewhat ridiculous. The Revolutionary Anarchist Clown Bloc in Philadelphia, who seemed to specialize in the creation of silly meta-chants ("Three-Word Chant! Three-Word Chant!") were only one particularly whimsical example. More typical are the high camp Radical Cheerleaders, experts in the improvisation of elaborate chants, or the even more ridiculous Billionaires.

To return for a moment to one of the events with which I begin the chapter:

Sunday, December 10, 2000
Peltier march jail solidarity, Manhattan

> Thirty or forty of us eventually find ourselves across the street from the precinct house where our friends are being held, and begin chanting traditional jail solidarity chants, mostly just "Let them go, let them go…," over and over again. These are soon interspersed with occasional chants from the march to break the monotony ("Free Leonard Peltier," and so on). A legal representative comes to visit the prisoners, enters the precinct, but is quickly turned away. She reports to us that the chants can be clearly heard in the precinct house and are really starting to annoy the cops. She thinks they are also likely audible to the prisoners, wherever they are—presumably deeper inside the station. Encouraged, some people propose we stick it out until the prisoners are

either let go or transferred out for booking.

The result is that a crowd of twenty or twenty-five remain, chanting, for several hours. Marathon chanting of this sort is not very easy to do. We have to take shifts. At any given time, maybe two thirds of us are relaxing on stoops; someone buys water, someone else shows up with bags of dumpster-dived bagels that had been brought to the IMC. The actual chanters ranged in a line above the curb. A few scavenge up materials for percussion instruments and end up crouched in a corner, masks on and hoods pulled up for maximum effect, making an improvised drum circle. At least then there's a beat weaving in and out of the chant.

By the time it starts drizzling, half an hour later, "Let them go" is clearly driving the cops crazy, but it's starting to drive us a little crazy too. A little circle forms behind the line of chanters, centering around three Radical Cheerleaders, to improvise appropriate new chants. Someone will throw out a line, someone else will come up with a rhyme, others will add more, help edit, or otherwise contribute, then someone will convey it to the chanters, or simply join the line. The chants get more and more event-specific:

We're wet, we're tired, and we want to pee
Enough is enough already!
Set our people free!

Before long, people are throwing out song names and we're turning them into chants. Twinkie, who has a remarkably loud voice, turns out to be a genius at this game. She can twirl out a lyric for almost anything.

"How 'bout Sesame Street?"

She starts in instantly:

Rainy day
Cops have taken our
Friends away…
Can you tell me where to go so we can we can
Set… them… free?
Can you tell me how to get,
How to get to Precinct Thirteen?

The most elaborate was a version of "The Twelve Days of Christmas" ("On the first day of Christmas, the police state gave to me…") which got up to about day five before a couple of the Radical Cheerleaders, newly returned from using the bathroom at a nearby store, remarked they didn't think that particular idea was in the best of taste.

This should be enough to give readers something of the flavor of such things. Such circles become little versions of what some British activists were later to call "laboratories of the insurrectionary imagination." Almost invariably, they are both fulcrums of creativity and places of extreme comic self-mockery. In fact, I would say this is a consistent tendency whenever activists begin to approach the fonts of creativity, the imagination, or even the sacred—three things that for many anarchists, I suspect, are largely indistinguishable. Rebels in Paris in 1968, as any anarchist knows, demanded "all power to the imagination." In fact, immanent in activist practice, I would say, is a theory that the ultimate form of power is precisely the power of the imagination. It is this power that creates sociality and social form; the experience of concocting a chant and witnessing it become a collective project becomes an immediate experience of such power. But this power is a sacred force that can only, possibly, be represented by ridiculous self-mockery. I think this will be clearer in the next section, where I discuss the role of puppetry and activist street theater.

PART III: MYTHOLOGICAL WARFARE

In the first section of the chapter I began to talk of myths, but I didn't really develop the subject. In this section I'd like to make good on my promise by saying a little something about the war of images. As I implied at the end of the last chapter, this war of images—particularly as it operates on television—is extremely important, since it appears to be the main means by which the tacit rules of engagement, and particularly the levels of force each side feels that they can use, are actually determined.[30]

What I want to do then is try to explore the kind of symbolic or, one might even say, mythological warfare that has been going on between activists and police, especially, but not exclusively, via the corporate media.[31] It's a complicated game because most activists, as I've pointed out, are extremely ambivalent about playing it, and many refuse to play completely. Nonetheless, those who do have not been entirely ineffective.

In some ways, in fact, they have been extraordinarily effective. Campaigns against the IMF, WTO, and against the neoliberal project in general, as I observed earlier, were able to change the terms of political argument with remarkable speed. On the eve of Seattle, in 1999, there was almost unanimous agreement among opinion makers in the US that ever more "free market reforms" were the only possible direction for any economy; internationally, the "Washington Consensus," as it was called, remained almost completely unchallenged, and neoliberal policies were treated as the inevitable face of globalization. Speaking as someone who got involved in the movement right after Seattle, I can attest that just about no one involved imagined that in a mere year and a half, this ideological apparatus would lie effectively shattered, and that even magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* would be running editorials saying we were right. We mostly imagined it would take a decade. (Of course, we also thought it might lead to profound, revolutionary social change: this didn't happen.) Obviously, this was more the work of activists in the Global South than of those in Europe and North America, but it was the very fact that the movement was, in fact, global that made it so effective.

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[30] Many of the arguments contained in this section I later adopted into an essay called "On the Phenomenology of Giant Puppets," that has already appeared in the collection *Possibilities*, in 2007.

[31] I borrowed the phrase "mythological warfare" from Mick Taussig (2006).

Still, for all the movement's effectiveness in conveying its negative message—that neoliberal policies are massively destructive—it proved almost completely incapable of conveying its positive message—particularly its call for new forms of direct democracy. There were, as I've noted, practical problems here: the fact that reporters and videographers were not allowed to be present at the meetings where these new forms of democracy were actually hammered out. A lot of it also had to do with standard journalistic conventions: the standard division between "peaceful protesters" marching with signs, and a "violent vanguard" breaking windows or provoking the police, left no room for the endlessly complex organization of real direct actions, with their blockades, affinity groups, lockdowns, clusters and spokescouncils, or even, for that matter, banner-hangs and street theater—all the things, really, that participants find most thrilling and inspiring. There's the fact that even if one can photograph or film a meeting, it's not a very interesting visual. There's the reluctance on the part of editors, and many reporters, to be used as a conduit for ideas of "violent" (or, anyway, unauthorized) groups. There's the fact that anarchists and direct-action oriented activists in general don't tend to engage in elaborate self-promotion about their own democratic process, but are more likely to write critiques of internal problems (racism, sexism, cliques, elitism) meant for other activists. There are an endless number of other reasons. This book, as I observed at the beginning, is in part written as an attempt to make up for all of this. Whatever the reasons, though, the standard media line—that globalization activists represented an incoherent babble of causes, without coherent analysis; that anarchists tend to be nihilists opposed to just about everything with no vision of an alternative society—have tended to stick. Even during the actions surrounding the Democratic and Republican conventions in 2000, originally conceived to challenge the very idea that the US is a democratic society, no major media source that I am aware of was willing or able to inform its audience that this was what the protests were supposed to be about.

What, then, does get through? What images or ideas have managed to get through the media and, in some sense, strike the popular imagination, or, better put, the imagination of America's TV audience? While I have not conducted any actual surveys, one doesn't have to spend much time monitoring news reports, watching movies, or just talking with ordinary citizens in order to get a sense of the answer. Even if people know nothing else about mass mobilizations like Seattle, they are almost certain to know two things:

1) They involve colorful giant puppets.
2) They involve protesters in black breaking windows.

To some degree this is just an effect of television: these are the most effective visuals most actions tend to provide. Still, they leave one with a kind of neat structural opposition: on the one hand, colorful giant papier-mâché birds and pigs and politicians in effigy ; on the other, faceless, anonymous masked anarchists in black destroying windows. One involves spectacular displays of whimsical creativity, the other, is anonymous, destructive, and deadly serious.

One could see this as simply a visual version of the peaceful protester/violent anarchist opposition, and that is certainly to some extent true. Still, I think, in a curious way, the opposition does end up conveying something about what such actions are trying to achieve. The idea behind property destruction is often conceived of, as many Seattle anarchists put it, a matter of "breaking the spell," smashing through the trance-like sense of inevitability created by consumer culture. In the words of the famous N30 Black Bloc communiqué:

> When we smash a window, we aim to destroy the thin veneer of legitimacy that surrounds private property rights. At the same time, we exorcise that set of violent and destructive social relationships which has been imbued in almost everything around us. By "destroying" private property, we convert its limited exchange value into an expanded use value. A storefront window becomes a vent to let some fresh air into the oppressive atmosphere of a retail outlet (at least until the police decide to tear gas a nearby road blockade). A newspaper box becomes a tool for creating such vents or a small blockade for the reclamation of public space or an object to improve one's vantage point by standing on it. A dumpster becomes an obstruction to a phalanx of rioting cops and a source of heat and light. A building facade becomes a message board to record brainstorm ideas for a better world.
>
> After N30, many people will never see a shop window or a hammer the same way again. The potential uses of an entire cityscape have increased a thousand-fold. The number of broken windows pales in comparison to the number

> of broken spells—spells cast by a corporate hegemony to lull us into forgetfulness of all the violence committed in the name of private property rights and of all the potential of a society without them. Broken windows can be boarded up (with yet more waste of our forests) and eventually replaced, but the shattering of assumptions will hopefully persist for some time to come (ACME Collective 1999).

These acts were quite intentionally meant to create a message in the media as well. In a scene in an anarchist video, appropriately entitled "Breaking the Spell," one Seattle anarchist comments, after watching a *60 Minutes* spot in which he was interviewed "We were expecting that *60 Minutes* would sensationalize property destruction. And that's what we wanted, since we feel property destruction is pretty sensational."

The question is one of the intended audience.

Smashing windows and spray-painting is a matter of taking an urban landscape full of endless corporate facades and flashing imagery, one that seems immutable, permanent, monumental, and demonstrating just how fragile it really is. It meant to be a literal shattering of illusions. It is a desecration of what seems monumental and permanent, a smashing of the surface of the Spectacle. Giant puppets, on the other hand, are the opposite. They are a matter of taking the most ephemeral of materials—ideas, paper, wire mesh—and transforming them into something very like a monument, even if they are, at the same time, ridiculous effigies. One might even say that puppets are a mockery of the very idea of a monument,[32] and of everything state monuments represent: the unapproachability, monochrome solemnity, above all permanence, the state's (ultimately somewhat ridiculous) attempt to turn its principle and history into eternal verities.

Of course, for the activists themselves, the real point is the process of their production, which is at once communal, egalitarian, and expressive. Puppet-making is a major collective project in the days or weeks leading up to a major action, or even a parade: tasks are organized so that as many people as possible can have a hand in it. The objects themselves are supposed to be temporary, not really expected to last to the next big action.

> **July 31, 2000, Philadelphia**
>
> ***From field note after visit to puppet warehouse***
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> The question I keep asking myself is: why are these things even called "puppets"? Normally one thinks of "puppets" as figures that move in response to the motions of some puppeteer. Most of these have few, if any, moving parts. These

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[32] I didn't make up this phrase, much though I would have liked to have. I owe it to Ilana Gershon.

> are more like moving statues, sometimes worn, sometimes carried. So in what sense are they "puppets"?
>
> Puppets are extremely visual, large, but also delicate and ephemeral. Usually they fall apart after a single action. This combination of huge size and lightness, it seems to me, makes them a bridge between words and reality. They are the point of transition; they represent the ability to start to make ideas real and take on solid form, to make our view of the world into something of equal physical bulk and greater spectacular power even than the engines of state violence that stand against it. The idea that they are extensions of our minds, words, may help explain the use of the term "puppets." They may not move around as an extension of some individual's will. But if they did, this would somewhat contradict the emphasis on collective creativity. Insofar as they are characters in a drama, it is a drama with a collective author; insofar as they are manipulated, it is in a sense by everyone, in processions, often passed around from one activist to the next. Above all they are meant to be emanations of a collective imagination. As such, for them either to become fully solid, or fully manipulable by a single individual, would contradict the point.

The sense that they simultaneously partake of, and subvert, the idea of a monument becomes particularly obvious at certain moments: for instance, during Bush's visit to the UK in 2003, when British activists built giant puppet statues of Bush in every city and then ritually pulled them down; or during the Republican convention in New York in 2004, when a giant puppet dragon was brought directly in front of the stadium where the convention was being held and set on fire.

The images are an attempt to encompass a certain kind of universe, including both what activists stand for and what they stand against. On the one hand, you have the Giant Pig that represents the World Bank, on the other the Giant Liberation Puppet (whose arms can block an entire highway), endangered species (the famous turtles), Haymarket martyrs, the Statue of Liberty, various pagan gods. On the other, you are likely to have just as many mocking effigies: like the corporate-control puppet during the Democratic convention protests in LA in 2000, a puppet that was, in turn, operating smaller marionettes of Bush and Gore, a giant riot policeman puppet that shot mock pepper spray, and so on. During actions, gods melt into costumes. Most major actions have a certain thematic costume or totem animal: turtles in Seattle, sharks and birds during the IMF protests that spring, skeletons in Philly (or there would have been; in fact the puppets were destroyed before they hit the streets), caribou during the 2001 inauguration—costumes that were usually distributed en masse to any who would take them. They tended to be concentrated among a broader carnival bloc, usually with some broad circus theme—a certain penumbra of unicyclists, accordionists, clowns, and stilt-walkers that seem to accompany any action, and surrounded by puppets, often alongside anarchist marching bands (the Hungry March Band, the Infernal Noize Brigade) or Radical Cheerleaders. When Tony Blair declared, during a summit in 2002, that he was not about to be influenced by "some anarchist traveling circus," many anarchists actually found the phrase quite appropriate. There is indeed something about the idea of a circus that directly appeals to anarchist sensibilities (and there are, in fact, a number of actual anarchist traveling circuses in America): not just the freakishness and challenging of all accepted sense of possibility, but also, I think, the fact that a circus is a collection of extreme individualists who are nonetheless engaged in a thoroughly cooperative enterprise. At any rate, such puppet and circus and street theater teams often dart back and forth during a major action to revive flagging spirits or generally entertain the troops. Even more, perhaps, they specialize in defusing and de-escalating situations that look like they might turn violent. In the absence of marshals, it's often the puppet teams who end up functioning as de facto peacekeepers: as organizers kept trying to emphasize to the press, for example, when the "Puppetistas" were all arrested before the action even began in Philadelphia.

Here's a description of a typical "puppet intervention" during the actions in Seattle:

> "People had linked arms," Zimmerman says. "The police had beaten and pepper-sprayed them already, and they threatened that they were coming back in five minutes to attack them again." But the protesters held their line, linking arms and crying, blinded by the pepper spray. Burger, Zimmerman, and their friends came along—on stilts, with clowns, a 40-foot puppet, and a belly dancer. They went up and down the line, leading the protesters in song. When the security van returned, they'd back the giant puppet up into its way. Somehow, this motley circus diffused the situation. "They couldn't bring themselves to attack this bunch of people who were now singing songs," Zimmerman says. Injecting humor and celebration into a grim situation, he says, is the essence of a puppet intervention.[33]

I've already described the blending of clowning and direct action techniques in the last chapter; puppets might be seen as part of the same phenomenon, essentially, an attempt to make the numinous comical—since they are also, paradoxically, simultaneously ridiculous, but also, in a way, profound.

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[33] From "Puppet Masters: Paper Hand Puppet Intervention brings its political theater back to Chapel Hill" (Independent Online, August 8, 2001), http://indyweek.com/durham/2001-08-08/ae.html), accessed February 13, 2003.

“Puppets are not cute, like muppets,” writes Peter Schumann of the Bread and Puppet Theater (this being the group that first introduced giant puppets to American politics in the 1960s). “Puppets are effigies and gods and meaningful creatures.” At the same time, though, they are obviously foolish, silly, ridiculous gods, ways of both trying to seize the power to make gods and make fun of that power simultaneously. One finds a similar impulse pretty much whenever, in such radical movements, one approaches the mythic or deeply meaningful: a kind of ridiculous self-mockery, which, however, is not meant to completely undercut the gravity and importance of what’s being asserted, but rather to imply the ultimate recognition that just because gods are human creations they are still real. You see it in the writings of Primitivists, who are self-consciously creating new myths about the Garden of Eden, the fall (it was all the fault of agriculture), and the inevitability of industrial collapse—but, at the same time as they seem to be asserting that they want most people on earth to die, they bridle at the suggestion that they really do. They are making self-consciously absurd, ultra-radical propositions at the same time as they are also treating them as the ultimate truths about a world of alienation. You see it in the pagans, the most active self-consciously religious elements in the direct action movement, who are quite capable of performing extravagant satires of pagan rituals that they nonetheless see as real, effective, rituals reflecting the deepest possible spiritual truths about the world.

For present purposes, though, what matters is not so much the implicit theory of creativity (interesting though this is), but how all this works as an alternative to more conventional approaches such as setting out unified position papers or designing one’s events around the preconceptions of the press. Clearly, those who smash a Starbucks window or create a giant puppet want those images to be disseminated by the media, both corporate and alternative. They also assume that there is something about them that will strike the popular imagination, to create a myth, as the Italian theorists of Ya Basta! liked to put it (Bui 2005), and carry meanings beyond whatever skeptical or hostile gloss the corporate media could place on it: a myth about the vulnerability of the Spectacle, about the possibilities of collectively creating new forms of meaning. In this, they were fairly effective. The reason it’s hard to see is that again, “the public” in America is rather a vague and loaded term. In a political context, it seems to evoke the image of a collection of white, middle-class, largely suburban couples in their forties at home watching TV. These are also seen as roughly corresponding to the all-important “undecideds” or swing voters in most electoral campaigns. However, one does not build a radical movement by trying to assuage the center. One does it first of all by trying to appeal to those who are already angry, alienated, oppressed, or marginalized, who don’t really need to be convinced that there is something profoundly wrong with the way the world is being run, but, rather, need to be shown some sign that the system is vulnerable, that there's something effective and not suicidal they can do. In this sense, anarchists really could be said to be "hijacking" or "kidnapping" the media, to convey messages to an unexpected constituency. At the same time, though, police officials have been playing a very similar game of images, with infinitely greater resources and, as we'll see, a great deal of ruthless cynicism, in order to create alarm among that very imagined "public" the anarchists have largely decided to ignore.

Mythological Warfare on the Part of the Police

The months immediately following the actions in Seattle saw concerted and sustained effort by government and especially "law enforcement" officials to figure out a way to justify the use of violence and preemptive measures against what gave every indication of becoming a budding social movement. It was accompanied by escalating use of aggressive police tactics that focused, at first, much more on the pacifists and on obviously nonviolent tactics like blockades and lockdowns than on anyone engaged in actions that could be described as criminal. While I am hardly privy to the reasoning adopted by the police—or whatever authorities contributed to security planning for international summits in this period—I can say that it's not altogether surprising that they did so.[34] By attempting to shut down major trade negotiations, IMF meetings, G8 summits, World Economic Forums, and the like, anarchists are quite intentionally trying to cause extreme inconvenience and annoyance for some of the world's richest and most powerful individuals. They are systematically spoiling the most important parties, junkets, and self-celebratory rituals of the international elite as part of a strategic plan intended to foil some of that elite's most cherished projects and plans. They may be doing it in such a way as not to physically endanger them, or in fact to hurt anyone (and since Seattle they might not have succeeded in actually shutting down any meetings), but they have succeeded in turning those meetings into nightmares, so dominated by elaborate security measures that they are in no sense celebrations. One would be naïve indeed to think that in a case like this, the legalities of the matter were what would prove the most important factor. Ever since Madeleine Albright made her phone call to the governor during the WTO actions in Seattle, the problem has not been whether to use violence against nonviolent activists, but how to justify doing so.

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[34] The best evidence available implies a kind of confluence of police intelligence groups of various sorts, Secret Service and other federal bodies, and a variety of private consulting firms and right-wing think tanks. However, it is dangerous to even speculate, since, despite the fact that everyone is aware that the authorities do develop concerted policies to deal with those they consider security threats, anyone who explicitly speculates on such matters runs the risk of being instantly dubbed a "conspiracy theorist."

It may be impossible to know what sort of policies were developed, or even precisely by whom, but it's easy to observe what happened. If one looks at major actions that followed in the immediate wake of Seattle, one finds that, in just about every case, police adopted a remarkably similar approach. Always we see preemptive strikes, justified by claims of threats of protester violence—threats that never quite materialized. Here are three typical incidents:

> **April 2000, Washington DC**
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> Hours before the protests against the IMF and World Bank are to begin, police seize the activists' convergence center, one of the main sites for making and storing puppets and banners to be used in the protest. Chief Ramsey loudly claims to have discovered a workshop for manufacturing molotov cocktails and homemade pepper spray inside. DC police later admit no such workshop existed (really they'd found paint thinner used in art projects and peppers being used for the manufacture of gazpacho); however, the convergence center remains closed and much of the art and puppets inside are appropriated.
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> **July 2000, Minneapolis**
>
> Days before a scheduled protest against the International Society of Animal Geneticists, local police claim that activists had detonated a cyanide bomb at a local McDonald's and might have their hands on stolen explosives. The next day the DEA raids a house used by organizers, drags off the beaten and bloodied activists inside, and appropriates their computers and piles of outreach materials. Police spokespeople later admit there never actually was a cyanide bomb (it was actually a smoke bomb) and they never had any evidence or reason to believe activists were really in possession of explosives.
>
> **August 2000, Philadelphia**
>
> Hours before the protests against the Republican convention are to begin, police, claiming to be acting on a tip, surround and invade the warehouse where the art, banners, and puppets used for the action are being prepared, ultimately arresting all seventy-five activists inside. Chief Timoney claims at a press conference that his men had discovered C4 explosives and water balloons full of hydrochloric acid inside the warehouse. Police spokesmen later admit no explosives or acid were really found; the arrestees, however, are not released. All of the puppets, banners, art, and literature to be used in the protest are systematically destroyed.

While it is possible that we are dealing with a remarkable series of honest mistakes, this looks a lot more like a series of attacks on the materials activists were intending to use to get their message out to the public, attempts to appropriate or destroy the means by which protesters intended to place images in the media, or—even more—attempts to replace images of art and puppets with images of bombs and cyanide.

Certainly, that's how activists interpreted them. By the time of Québec, one of the biggest discussions before every new mobilization had become where to hide the giant puppets. It was simply assumed that the police would attack them. The full culmination of this model of repression only came during the Free Trade Area of the Americas Act meetings in Miami in 2003, when the Miami city council actually passed a bill that made the display of puppets illegal during the summit (ostensibly because they could be used to conceal weapons) and the police strategy consisted almost entirely of preemptive strikes against activists, hundreds of whom were swept up and charged with planning—but never quite actually performing—unspeakable acts. As a result, the Black Bloc in Miami actually ended up spending most of their time and energy on protecting the puppets, when they finally did appear on the streets. According to one eyewitness report, after police routed protesters from Seaside Plaza, forcing them to abandon their puppets, officers spent the next half hour or so systematically attacking and destroying them: shooting, kicking, slashing, and ripping the papier-mâché remains; one even putting a giant puppet in his squad car with the head sticking out and driving so as to smash it against every sign and streetpost in sight.

WHY DO COPS HATE PUPPETS?

There does seem to be a peculiar animus against giant puppets on the part of the US constabulary. In fact, police often seem to hate puppets a good deal more than they do the Black Bloc. Many activists have spent time speculating on why this might be. It doesn't help to ask police officers themselves. They will almost invariably say the same thing: that such objects are dangerous, there's no way to know what's really inside them—how do we know that they aren't being used to hide bombs or weapons? Or that the wooden frames could be used as cudgels or even battering rams? It seems hard to give much credit to such claims in a case like Miami, though, when even after the City Council had tried to ban the display of puppets on this basis, police eventually had the opportunity to take such puppets literally apart. If nothing else, you don't shoot plastic bullets at an object you really think might contain a bomb.

At one point, I asked a few activist friends their opinions on the matter, and discovered that just about all of them had thought about it too:

> **David Corston-Knowles**: You have to bear in mind these are people who are trained to be paranoid. They have to ask themselves whether something so

> big and inscrutable might contain explosives, even if that seems absurd from a nonviolent protester's perspective. Police view their jobs not just as law enforcement, but also as maintaining order. And they take that very personally. Giant demonstrations and giant puppets aren't orderly. They are about creating something—a different society, a different way of looking at things—and creativity is fundamentally at odds with the status quo.
>
> **Daniel Lang**: Well, one theory is that the cops just don't like being upstaged by someone putting on a bigger show. After all, normally *they're* the spectacle: they've got the blue uniforms, they've got the helicopters and horses and rows of shiny motorcycles. So maybe they just resent it when someone steals the show by coming up with something even bigger and even more visually striking. They want to take out the competition.
>
> **Yvonne Liu**: It's because they're so big. Cops don't like things that tower over them. That's why they like to be on horses. Plus puppets are silly and round and misshapen. Notice how much cops always have to maintain straight lines? They stand in straight lines, they always try to make you stand in straight lines. I think round, misshapen things offend them.
>
> **Max Uhlenbeck**: Obviously, they hate to be reminded that they're puppets themselves.

One could multiply this sort of speculation endlessly. I think this question is actually quite important and I'll return to it in a moment, but for now, let me continue with the months that followed Seattle.

During that period, one began to see increasingly outlandish accounts of what had happened at Seattle. During the WTO protests themselves, no one, including the police, had claimed that activists had done anything more militant than break a plate-glass window. There were no claims in the press of protesters attacking police, or for that matter anyone else; in fact, the only interpersonal violence I'm aware of by activists came when a number of self-appointed "peace cops" tried to prevent some of the Black Bloc anarchists from breaking windows, and on some occasions ended up physically assaulting them (the anarchists, who were mostly quite fastidious about their dedication to nonviolence, refused to hit back). Yet no more than three months later, the *Boston Herald* reported that officers from Seattle had come to brief the local police on how to deal with "Seattle tactics," such as attacking police with "chunks of concrete, BB guns, wrist rockets and large capacity squirt guns loaded with bleach and urine."[35] A few months later, when *New York Times* reporter Nichole Christian, apparently relying on police sources in Detroit, claimed that Seattle demonstrators had "hurled Molotov cocktails, rocks and excrement at delegates and police officers," NYC DAN held a protest outside their offices demanding the *Times* explain itself, and the paper was actually forced to run a retraction, admitting Seattle authorities confirmed that no objects had been thrown at human beings.[36] Despite this, Christian's account appears to have become canonical. Each time there is a new mobilization, stories invariably surface in local newspapers with the same list of "Seattle tactics"—a list that also appears to have become enshrined in training manuals distributed to street cops. Before the Miami Summit of the Americas in 2003, for example, circulars distributed to local businessmen and civic groups, based on information from "security consultants" listed every one of these "Seattle tactics" as what they should expect to see on the streets once anarchists arrived:

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[35] Jose Martinez, "Police prep for protests over biotech conference at Hynes," *Boston Herald*, Saturday, March 4, 2000.

> **Wrist Rockets**—larger hunter-type slingshots that they use to shoot steel ball bearings or large bolts. A very dangerous and deadly weapon.
>
> **Molotov Cocktails**—many were thrown in Seattle and Québec and caused extensive damage.
>
> **Crow Bars**—to smash windows, cars, etc. They also pry up curbs, then break the cement into pieces that they can throw at police officers. This was done extensively in Seattle.
>
> **Squirt guns**—filled with acid or urine[37]

thus ensuring that when the protests began, most of downtown Miami lay shuttered and abandoned. To this day, most journalists react with incredulity when one points out that, in the United States at least, no one, at a globalization protest, has ever thrown a molotov cocktail.[38]

Some police officials have become notorious among activists for their Gothic imaginations. John Timoney, chief of police in Philadelphia during the 2000 Republican convention, and in Miami during the 2003 Free Trade Area of the Americas summit, is fond of particularly lurid claims. During Philly, for example, there seemed to be a policy of announcing one particularly outrageous claim each day. On the first, police claimed to have captured a van being used to transport poisonous snakes and reptiles, that activists planned to release amongst the citizenry; on the second, that an officer had been hospitalized after having his face splashed with acid; on the third, that police had discovered "dry ice bombs" planted around the city. I was working with activist media teams during much of this time and got to see for myself how much time those working the phones had to spend trying to figure out what on earth reporters were talking about, since these were considered far more important stories than, say, the mass arrest at the puppet warehouse and destruction of the puppets. In every case, police either were later forced to withdraw their claims, or at least, to stop talking about them. In the first, the vehicle turned out to be a pet store supply van; in the second, the officer turned out to have been splashed by red paint; in the third, it appears the dry ice bombs were something police picked up from perusing the notorious *Anarchist Cookbook* published in the 1970s, and had no basis in anything at all. During the FTAA in Miami, there were similar lurid reports of injured police, all sorts of projectiles, and most of all, activists assaulting Timoney's troops with every manner of bodily fluids. Such charges invariably make splashy headlines when first announced, or sensationalist reports on the nightly news. When they turn out to be false, this in itself almost never is seen to merit a story or correction. In other words, police spokesmen appear to be aware of, and taking full advantage of, the fact that American journalists will report pretty much anything they say at briefings as simple fact, and that they are rarely interested in running stories explaining that something has turned out not to be true. In the case of Timoney, the pattern (at least as I observed it) was for journalists to first greet activists with incredulity or even ridicule when they suggested police might be lying; then, after seeing such claims repeatedly proved false, to simply stop reporting them, without ever acknowledging they'd been duped.

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[36] *New York Times*, June 6, Corrections, A2. The original story was significantly entitled, "Detroit Defends Get-Tough Stance" by Nichole Christian, June 4, 2000, A6. The correction reads: "An article on Sunday about plans for protests in Detroit and in Windsor, Ontario, against an inter-American meeting being held in Windsor through today referred incorrectly to the protests last November at the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle. The Seattle protests were primarily peaceful. The authorities there said that any objects thrown were aimed at property, not people. No protesters were accused of throwing objects, including rocks and Molotov cocktails, at delegates or police."

[37] This document was transcribed and widely circulated on activist listservs at the time. According to one story in the *Miami Herald* ("Trade protesters mean business, analyst warns," Joan Fleischman, October 1, 2003), it derived from "retired DEA agent Tom Cash, 63, now senior managing director for Kroll Inc., an international security and business consulting firm." Cash in turn claimed to derive his information from "police intelligence" sources.

[38] Canada is, as we've seen, rather different in this regard; or at least Québec is.

The Boston example is particularly striking because it suggests that, in some cases, police higher-ups might not even be primarily concerned with influencing the media: in some cases at least, the primary target audience is the police themselves. It is hard to see what other reason there would be to order street cops to take part in trainings in which they are taught to expect extremely violent tactics that those in charge must be aware had never actually been used. Of course, there's only so far one can generalize from a single case. One can only wonder if what happened in Boston was an isolated event, or an example of a much more common practice that usually goes unreported. Similarly, it's very difficult to know who, precisely, these so-often-cited "police intelligence" sources actually are. Here we seem to be entering a murky zone involving information being collected, concocted, and disseminated and passed back and forth between a variety of federal police task forces, private security agencies, and right-wing think tanks, many of whom may well be convinced that at least some of these stories are true, since they get most of their information from the other ones. Here too, though, I suspect probably the first concern of those who tell lurid stories of bleach and urine is simply to rally the troops. As commanders discovered in Seattle, police officers who are used to considering themselves protectors of the public will frequently balk, or at least hesitate, when given orders to make a baton charge against a collection of obviously nonviolent sixteeen-year-old girls. It seems hard, for example, to understand the peculiar obsession with bodily fluids in so many of these reports except as part of a self-conscious campaign to appeal to police sensibilities. Certainly it has nothing to do with activist ones.

Presented with endless accusations of hurling and shooting of urine and feces, activists I know are mostly puzzled. Some will tentatively suggest that maybe the stories originally go back to occasions when police laid siege to squatted buildings, and buckets full of human waste were one of the few non-lethal projectiles available. Most, though, have no idea. Certainly, I've never heard of anyone actually bringing such items to an action. Yet the accusation is leveled time and time again. If police arrest activists in preemptive attacks, for instance, one can be pretty sure they have planted evidence on them if they announce that the suspects were discovered carrying "crowbars and vials full of urine." Police in press conferences have actually been known to display such bags of excrement or jars of urine they claim were intended to be thrown at them (leaving activists to wonder where exactly they really got these things). The claims seem to echo the endlessly repeated assertion that, during the Vietnam war protesters used to "spit on anyone wearing a uniform," and, of course, the broader notion that the best justification for violence on the part of police are deliberate assaults on their honor. It's as if someone was trying to imagine the most dishonorable thing one could possibly do to an officer, and then insisting this was precisely what anarchists will always try to do. That there was probably some kind of coordination in this effort might be gleaned, too, from the fact that it was precisely at this time that mayors and police chiefs around America began regularly declaring, in almost exactly identical words (and of course based on no evidence whatsoever) that anarchists were actually a bunch of spoiled rich kids, who disguised their faces so their parents wouldn't recognize them on TV. This accusation soon became received wisdom among law enforcement professionals across America.[39] As I mentioned in Chapter 6, this sort of claim seems to have been carefully designed to both rally the troops, and convey something of the desired rules of engagement: "Do not be gentle with these people, take out your resentments on them if you like, but don't actually maim or kill them because, you never know who their parents might turn out to be."

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[39] Here is an example from the AbolishTheBank listserv, "DC Police and Posters in the City," Wed, 22 Aug 2001. "I was biking thru NW yesterday and I saw a DC bike cop ripping down posters at 2nd-3rd and Mass Ave. I asked him why he was tearing them down and he told me to F off, and called me a bleeding heart. He then said 'these anarchists' are just a bunch of spoiled white upper-middle-class kids who didn't get enough love from their parents" And I should not give a damn because they don't care about my people, black and hispanics, they just want to

The Hollywood Movie Principle

The real problem for the police in the months following Seattle appears to have been a crisis in public perception. To the frustration of officials, CEOs, and trade bureaucrats, the American public refused to see the global justice movement as a threat requiring forcible suppression. As I pointed out during the Ya Basta! debate cited above, one of the few polls of public opinion on the matter, taken during the Republican convention in 2000, found that surprisingly large numbers of TV viewers felt sympathy or even pride when they saw images of protesters—this despite the fact that TV coverage was uniformly negative, treating protests exclusively as a security concern.[40] There's a simple reason for this, I think. I would propose to dub it "the Hollywood movie principle." Most Americans, in watching a dramatic confrontation on TV, effectively ask themselves: "If this were a Hollywood movie, who would be the good guys?" Presented with a contest between a crowd of idealistic young people who don't actually seem to injure anyone, and a crowd of heavily armed riot cops protecting trade bureaucrats, corporate CEOs, or politicians, the answer is self-evident. In movies, in fact, the logic of the "rogue cop" is completely inverted. Individual maverick cops can be movie heroes. Riot cops can never be. In fact, in Hollywood movies, riot cops almost never appear; the closest one can find to this sort of imagery are the Imperial Storm Troopers in *Star Wars*, who, with their leader Darth Vader, stand for most Americans as one of the very icons of mechanized evil. This point is not lost on the anarchists, who have, since A16 at least, taken to regularly bringing recordings of the Imperial Storm Trooper music from *Star Wars* to blast from their ranks as soon as a line of riot cops starts to advance.

So the question became: What would it take to cast protesters in the role of the villain?

In the immediate aftermath of Seattle, the media and public officials did their

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break stuff and act like martyrs. A bit shocked and bewildered by the conversation I just said what about the 1st Amendment? and rode off. Any one else see him yesterday afternoon?"

[40] Monday, August 21st, "Convention Protests Bring Mixed Reactions" (Reuters/Zogby). "In a Zogby America survey of 1,004 adults, 32.9% said they were proud of the protesters, while another 31.2% said they were wary. Another 13.2% said they were sympathetic and 15.7% irritated and 6.9% said they were unsure." Considering the almost uniform hostility of the coverage, the fact that a third of the audience were nonetheless "proud," and that less than one in six were sure their reaction was negative, is quite remarkable.

best to create an hysteria over broken windows. The imagery certainly seems to have struck a chord—as I observed, there are few Americans unaware that windows were broken. But these efforts were, ultimately, to surprisingly little effect. But this makes sense too: in Hollywood terms, property destruction is a very minor peccadillo. In fact, if the popularity of the various Terminators, Lethal Weapons, or Die Hards reveal anything, it's that Americans rather like the idea of property destruction. If most did not themselves harbor a certain hidden glee at the idea of someone smashing a branch of their local bank, or a McDonald's (not to mention police cars, shopping malls, and complex construction machinery), why would they be so regularly willing to pay money to watch idealistic do-gooders smashing and blowing them up for hours on end—if always in ways that, through the magic of the movies, but also like the practice of the Black Bloc, leave innocent bystanders entirely unharmed? Certainly, it's unlikely that there are significant numbers of Americans who have not, at some time or another, had a fantasy about smashing up their bank. In the land of demolition derbies and monster trucks, Black Bloc anarchists might be said to be living a hidden aspect of the American dream.

Obviously, these are just fantasies. I am certainly aware most working-class Americans do not overtly approve of, much less advocate, the destroying of Starbucks facades. But, unlike the talking classes, neither, around 2000, did they see such activity as a threat to the nation, let alone anything requiring military-style repression.

One could even say that, in a sense, the Black Bloc appear to be the latest avatars of an artistic/revolutionary tradition which runs through the Dadaists and Situationists: one that tries to play off the contradictions of capitalism by turning its own destructive, leveling forces against it. Capitalist societies—and America in particular—are, in essence, potlatch societies. That is, they are built around the spectacular destruction of consumer goods. These are societies that imagine themselves as built on a nexus between "production" and "consumption," endlessly spitting out products and then destroying them again. Since it is all based on the principle of infinite expansion of industrial production—the very principle which the Black Bloc anarchists, mostly being highly ecologically conscious anti-capitalists, are particularly opposed to—all that stuff has to be endlessly destroyed to make way for new products. But this, in turn, means inculcating a certain passion or delight in the smashing and destruction of property, which can very easily slip into a delight in the shattering of those structures of relation that make capitalism possible; it is a system that can only renew itself by cultivating a hidden pleasure at the prospect of its own destruction.[41]

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[41] It might be significant here that the United States' main exports to the rest of the world, after weapons, are (a) Hollywood action movies and (b) personal computers. If you think about

There is a history here. Radical puppeteers also tend to be keenly aware that their art harkens back to the wickerwork giants and dragons, Gargantuas and Pantagruels, typical of medieval festivals. Even those who have not themselves read Rabelais or Bakhtin are certainly familiar with the notion of the carnivalesque. Massive convergences are almost always framed as "carnivals against capitalism" or "festivals of resistance." The base-line reference seems to be the late Medieval world immediately before the emergence of capitalism, particularly the period after the Black Death when the sudden decline in population had the effect of putting unprecedented amounts of money into the hands of the laboring classes (see, e.g., Federici 2004). Most of it ended up being poured into popular festivals of one sort or another, which themselves began to multiply until they took up large parts of the calendar year. These were what nowadays might be called events of "collective consumption," celebrations of carnality and rowdy pleasures and—if Bakhtin (1984) is to be believed—tacit attacks on the principle of hierarchy itself.[42] One might say that the first wave of capitalism, the Puritan moment as it's sometimes called, had to begin with a concerted assault on this world, which was condemned by improving landlords and nascent capitalists as pagan, immoral, and utterly unconducive to the maintenance of labor discipline. Of course, the movement to ban all moments of public festivity could not last forever; Cromwell's reign in England is reviled to this day on the grounds that he banned Christmas; more importantly, once moments of festive, collective consumption were eliminated, the nascent capitalism would be left with the obvious problem of how to sell its products, particularly in light of the need to constantly expand production. The result was what one might call a process of the privatization of desire: the creation of endless individual, familial, or semi-furtive forms of consumption, none of which, as we are so often reminded, could really be fully satisfying or else the whole logic of endless expansion wouldn't work. While one should hardly imagine that police strategists are fully aware of all this, the very existence of police is tied to a political cosmology which sees such forms of collective consumption as inherently disorderly, and (much like a medieval carnival) always brimming with the possibility of violent insurrection. Order means that citizens should go home and watch TV.[43]

However, since this sense of festival as threatening does not appear to resonate

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it, they form a kind of complementary pair to the brick-through-window/giant puppet set I've been describing—or, rather, the brick/puppet set might be considered a kind of subversive, desublimated reflection of them—the first involving paeans to property destruction, the second, the endless ability to create new, but ephemeral, insubstantial imagery in the place of older, more permanent forms.

[42] I have developed some of these ideas in an essay of my own: see Graeber 1997.

[43] Where they will normally turn on shows that take the perspective of the same police in charge of getting them off the streets to begin with. More on this later.

with large sectors of the TV audience, the authorities were forced, as it were, to change the script. What we've seen is a very calculated campaign of symbolic warfare, an attempt to eliminate images of colorful floats and puppets, and substitute images of bombs and hydrochloric acid. Insofar as they were successful, it was because it rarely occurs to members of that same TV audience that on matters of public security, their government representatives would simply be making such things up.

CONCLUSIONS

So why do cops hate puppets?

Clearly it's not just because they think there might be bombs inside—much though the puppet full of explosives is, no doubt, much like the water gun full of bleach and urine, a telling symbol in itself. Here, I think we must return to the earlier question of rules of engagement.

In an essay written shortly after the Rodney King affair, Marc Cooper made the fascinating point that most of the cases in which Americans are severely beaten by police, the victim is innocent of any crime. Innocent citizens are more likely to be beaten than criminals because they're more likely to talk back. And if you want to cause a policeman to be violent, this is the surest way to do it. He cites the reflections of a former policeman named Jim Fyfe:

> "Burglars and rapists aren't necessarily 'assholes' in the eye of the LAPD," says Fyfe. "An asshole is a person who does not accept whatever the police officer's definition is of any situation. Cops expect everyone, including a stopped motorist, to be subservient. Any challenge—or the mortal sin of talking back—and you become an 'asshole.' And 'assholes' are to be re-educated so they don't mouth off again. The real cases of brutality come in the cases of 'assholes.' Cops don't beat up burglars." (Cooper 1991:30).

The critical phrase here is: "does not accept whatever the police officer's definition is of any situation." This is the power that police guard most jealously, the one that they are most likely to defend with violence: the power to define the situation. There is something very profound here; the key, perhaps, to the nature of violence itself. I will explain why I think so in the final chapter; for now, though, let me just emphasize that this is precisely what radical puppeteers are trying to subvert.

Let us imagine, for a moment, a conflict between two principles of political action. One might even say, between two different conceptions of reality. The first is a politics that assumes that the ultimate reality is one of forces, but where "force" really operates as a euphemism for various technologies of violence. After all to be a "realist" in politics has nothing to do with recognizing material realities, it is all about willingness to accept the realities of violence. Violence is what defines the ultimate truth of situations. This is presumably why police can allow themselves to be so relativistic about questions of ultimate truth or morality. If the only unquestionable reality is the power to harm others, then probably the best course of action is simply to ensure that everyone is at least playing by some kind of clear set of rules. On the other side, we might imagine a politics of the imagination. By this I mean not so much a political project of giving "power to the imagination," but a recognition that imagination and creativity are always the ultimate source of power.[44] Hence their peculiar quality of being simultaneously sacred and ridiculous. What anarchists regularly attempt—and what puppets embody—is a systematic and continual challenge to the right of the police, or any other authority, to define the situation. They do it by proposing endless alternative frameworks. Or they do it by insisting on the power to switch frameworks whenever they like. This is, clearly, the point of the "puppet intervention," just as it was the effect of the sudden appearance of the Clowns and Billionaires in Philadelphia. They aggressively shifted frames. They also did so in a way that was very much to activists' tactical advantage, and threw the police completely off their game.

Let us return, then, to the notion of rules of engagement.

At the end of the last chapter, I argued that, in the United States, it is ordinarily assumed that the rules of engagement during mass actions will be negotiated indirectly: to some degree through the courts, but largely through the corporate media. The result is a decidedly uneven playing field. It's not entirely lopsided, since even though the corporate media sets their stories up in such a way that things are very much slanted in favor of police, and is easily manipulated by them, its audience is by no means a collection of passive dupes and tends, all other things being equal, to sympathize with underdogs. It was only after September 11, really, that the government correctly sensed that the ground had shifted to the point where they could get away with pure repression, which they proceeded to put into effect during the FTAA actions in Miami in 2003—using not only unprecedented violence (tasers, plastic and wooden bullets, stepped-up torture and abuse of prisoners), but many of the same media techniques, such as embedded reporters, developed for use with military units overseas. Had it not been for the almost unprecedented disaster of 9/11, matters would almost certainly have developed differently.

Anarchists tend to reject this logic of indirect negotiation anyway. It's not that they are uniformly opposed to attempts to influence the courts or media (indeed, they would be very foolish to abandon this territory to the enemy entirely), but no anarchist, I think it's safe to say, would be willing to accept an arrangement where street actions end up being reduced to something like soccer games, with all the rules worked out in advance. The entire logic of direct action militates against that. Instead, just as in consensus process, they collapse together two things that are normally considered separate levels—the process of decision making and the means of its enforcement—so here, in street actions, they tend insofar as possible to collapse the political, negotiating process into the structure of the action itself. They attempt to win the contest, as it were, by continually changing the definition of what is the field, what are the rules, what are the stakes—and they do it on the field itself. During street actions, a situation that is sort of like nonviolent warfare becomes a situation that is sort of like a circus, or a theatrical performance, or a solemn ritual, and might equally well slip back to nonviolent warfare once again. Of course, from the point of view of the police, this is simply cheating. Activists are not fighting fair. From their perspective, the puppets might as well actually be carrying bombs, because everything is potentially deceitful. But, as we've seen the police aren't fighting fair either. They can't, as a matter of principle, treat the other side like honorable opponents, since that would imply they are in some sense equals. Hence, insofar as there would seem to be tacit rules, they regularly break them, and when dealing with the media, their spokesmen lie.

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[44] Aside from the Situationists, the French theorist one will encounter the most often in anarchist bookstores is Cornelius Castoriadis, the great theorist of the revolutionary imaginary.

One can think of the problem here as analogous to the familiar paradox of constituent power: that since no system can create itself (i.e., any God capable of instituting physical laws cannot be bound by those laws, any sacred king capable of instituting a legal order cannot be bound by its dictates), any legal/political order can only be created by some force to which that legality does not apply. A constitution cannot itself be created by constitutional means; and indeed, eighteenth-century American and French revolutionaries were quite clearly guilty of treason according to the laws under which they grew up. In modern Euro-American history, this has meant that the legitimacy of constitutions ultimately harkens back to some kind of popular revolution: revolutions being precisely the point, in my terms, where the politics of force does meet the politics of imagination.

Now, of course, revolution is precisely what the people with the puppets are ultimately trying to achieve; even if they are trying to achieve it with an absolute minimum of violence. But it seems to me that what really provokes the most violent reactions on the part of the police is precisely this attempt to make constituent power—the power of popular imagination to create new institutional forms—present; and not just in brief flashes, but continually. A movement based on principles of direct action is a movement dedicated to permanently challenging their ability to define the situation. The insistence that the rules of engagement, as it were, can be constantly renegotiated on the field of battle, that you can constantly change the narrative in the middle of the story, is, in this light, just one aspect of a much larger defiance of authority.

This makes it easier to see why giant puppets, that are so extraordinarily creative, but at the same time so intentionally ephemeral, that make a mockery of the very idea of the eternal verities monuments are meant to represent, can so easily become the very symbol of this attempt to grab the power of social creativity.[45] This power is the power to recreate and redefine institutions—basically, everything that the standard media portrayals (which never talk about the fact that activists are trying to recreate democratic process, imagine new forms of organization, etc.) make disappear. From the perspective of the "forces of order," puppets are veritably demonic for just this reason—in fact, there's a long-standing tradition, especially vivid in America, of seeing creativity as being somehow demonic—because they perfectly embody the principle of revolution. Bakunin's famous aphorism—"the desire to destroy is also a creative urge"—seems to be recognized, here, largely in reverse.

Perhaps this is why so many Americans find clowns somehow frightening. That was the conclusion anyway reached by many of those who took part in the "Revolutionary Anarchist Clown Bloc" in Philadelphia—almost all of whom ended up beaten or arrested, even as the Billionaires managed to leave the field entirely unscathed. "The problem with the clown concept," one later explained at a DAN meeting, "turned out to be that most Americans do not think of clowns as funny. They think of them as scary. On the other hand, most Americans think the idea of someone beating up a clown is very funny." For all the pleasure movie-watchers find, after all, in watching the destruction of shopping malls, such plots do, after all, tend to end with some heroic cop killing off the villain and thus forcibly restoring some notion of normality. There is pleasure in smashing the Spectacle. But, in the application of violence to define the situation, apparently, there is pleasure, too.

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[45] The T-shirt of the Arts in Action collective that actually makes many of these puppets features a quote from Brecht: "We see art not as a mirror to hold up to reality but as a hammer with which to shape it."

CHAPTER 10:

IMAGINATION

All Nations: Hallucinations

Are you willing to die for the future of an illusion?

If we insist on maintaining a state we can obey, then we have to breed children who will die for it. So quit whining.

—Anonymous Anarchist Poster

This chapter is not really a conclusion. In a way, writing conclusions for a work of ethnography is always a questionable undertaking. The purpose of ethnography is essentially descriptive. A good description, certainly, requires appeal to theory, but in ethnography, theory is properly deployed in the service of description rather than the other way around. If the aim of an ethnographic description is to try to give the reader the means to imaginatively pass inside a moral and social universe, then it seems exploitative, insulting almost, to suggest that other people live their lives or pursue their projects in order to allow some scholar to score a point in some arcane theoretical debate. And, anyway, it's factually untrue.

Instead, I would like to end with a few rather brief theoretical reflections, inspired by my own participation with DAN and similar groups. Since, needless to say, my involvement in such groups was continually inspiring me with new ideas, consider this last chapter, then, a moment in a dialogue.

Let me start by enlarging on one of the ideas with which I ended the last chapter: the division between political ontologies of violence and political ontologies of the imagination. This will make it possible to knit together a few similar ideas that popped up in earlier parts of the book.

I have already discussed the first sort of political ontology at the end of Chapter 6 in the section called "on the ideological effects of government regulation." Why was it, I asked, that projects of radical social transformation are always seen as profoundly "unrealistic," as idle dreams that seem to melt away the moment they encounter hard material realities? It's not simply, I suggested, the effect of the force of habit, or even the fact that one can never really be certain whether any social experiment will actually work. At least, not in the way these things are immediately experienced. It is the fact that large, heavy, valuable objects—houses, cars, boats, let alone factories—are, in industrial societies, invariably surrounded by endless government regulation. These regulations are enforced by violence. True, police rarely come in swinging billy clubs to enforce fire code regulations (unless of course, they are dealing with anarchists); but this just helps to make the violence invisible, and to make the effects of all these regulations—regulations that almost always assume that normal relations between individuals are mediated by the market, and that normal groups are organized hierarchically—seem to emanate not from the government's monopoly of the use of force, but from the largeness, solidity, and heaviness of the objects themselves.

When one is asked to be "realistic" then, the reality one is being asked to recognize is not one of natural, material facts; neither is it really some supposed ugly truth about human nature. Normally, it is a recognition of the effects of the systematic use, or threat, of physical harm. We are dealing with the shadow of the state. I think this is crucial; so crucial, actually, that it's worth pausing for a moment over some of the examples mentioned earlier. In international relations, a political "realist" is considered one that accepts that states will use whatever capacities they have at their disposal, including force of arms, to pursue their national interests. As I noted at the time, this is a profoundly metaphysical idea. The belief that states—abstract entities like "France" or "India"—are entities of the same nature as individual human beings, with their own interests and purposes has nothing to do with the recognition of any material reality. Kings of France and emperors of India had interests and purposes. "France" and "India" do not. It is only through the complex metaphysics of "sovereignty," which project the attributes of kings and emperors onto entire populations (through the medium of some political apparatus), that we can even imagine that they could. What makes it seem "realistic" to say that nations have "interests" is simply that, like kings, those currently in control of states have the power to raise armies, launch invasions, lay siege to cities, and otherwise threaten the use of organized violence to pursue those interests—and that it would be foolish to ignore that possibility. These things are real because they can kill you.

Sovereignty of course means both the power to wage war outside one's borders and the power to maintain a monopoly over the use of coercive force within. This, I argued, creates a similar reality effect in matters of property. If that argument seemed in any way far-fetched, one might consider here that the origins of the word "real," as in "real property" or "real estate," itself. Unlike other uses of "real" it is not derived from the Latin *res*, meaning "thing." It is derived from the Spanish *real*, meaning "royal" or "regal," and originally meant "belonging to the king." All land within a sovereign territory belongs ultimately to the sovereign and this is still legally the case (this is why the state has the power to seize land through eminent domain). Sovereignty is also the legal basis for a state's power to impose regulations. Just as Giorgio Agamben (1998) famously argued that, from the perspective of sovereign power, something is alive because you can kill it, so property is "real" because you can seize or destroy it.

Ultimately, this kind of political ontology shades into one in which the power to destroy, to cause others pain, or to break, damage, or mangle their bodies, is treated as the social equivalent of the very energy that drives the cosmos. Again, this might seem an odd statement, but some such vision seems implicit in much of the language used to describe how states operate. Take the word "force." When you make someone do something against their will—say, by threatening to break their legs if they refuse—you are said to "force" them to do so. "Force" is power based on the systematic threat, or use, of violence. The state is also said to have a monopoly of the legitimate use of coercive "force." If one employs a legitimist definition of violence, one that makes it impossible to say that agents of the state behaved violently if they were doing something they had been properly authorized to do, then this is the word you use instead: protesters were violent (one broke a window), police responded with force (they began firing plastic bullets into the crowd). This is actually a very subtle usage. Consider the following six sentences:

1) The police arrived at the square and opened fire on the protesters.
2) Several fell to the ground as the **force** of plastic bullets impacted them.
3) Others were **forced** to the ground and handcuffed.
4) Police then **forced** them into arrest vans.
5) As a result, the remaining protesters were **forced** to abandon the square.
6) The police **force** secured the area.

In sentence #2 "force" refers to simple physics: an object of a certain mass traveling at a certain speed can be said to strike another object with a certain degree of force. The usage in sentence #3 is close, since the protesters were presumably forced to the ground by the downward pressure of truncheons and human muscle, but it blends into the more ambiguous usage in sentence #4, where likely as not sheer physical pressure (pushing arrestees, prodding, dragging, even carrying them) was supplemented by the giving of orders backed by implicit or explicit threats. In sentence #5, "force" refers only to the effects of fear of further physical attack. Finally, it is because of their ability to employ violence and the threat of violence, in the most efficient way possible to do things like clear squares, that the police can be referred to as "a force" (as they are in sentence #6), just as a general could say he commands a "force" of a hundred thousand men, or the military as a whole can be referred to as "the armed forces." There is a continuum, then, of usages. But the overall effect is to merge the most basic principles of physics with the psychological effects of threatening others with suffering and pain.

One might object that the metaphor is inevitable because in sheer physical terms, violence does tend to involve a great deal of physical force. This may be true. But any form of human action involves some level of force (singing for instance involves forcing air out of one's lungs), and many (driving a car) involve deploying far more force than it would take to wrestle a thousand protesters to the ground. We appear to be in the presence of a classic form of ideological naturalization. What might otherwise seem a rather tawdry human practice—establishing a set of rules and then threatening to hurt anyone who disobeys them—is treated as equivalent to one of the elementary constituents of the physical universe.

In fact, we are constantly borrowing terms from one domain to describe the other: "law," "force," "power." Compare the following sentences:

> Scientists investigate the nature of physical laws so as to understand the forces that govern the universe.
> Police are experts in the scientific application of physical force in order to enforce the laws that govern society.

So this is one ontology. Activists, I am suggesting, appear to be working with a very different one: a different set of assumptions about what's really real, about the very grounds of being. I've referred to it as a "political ontology of the imagination," for reasons that I hope will soon be clear, but I could have just as easily called it an ontology of creativity, or of making, or invention, or any number of different things.

I am not saying this is a universally valid distinction. I suspect the reason it exists can be traced back to some peculiar features of Western theories of knowledge: particularly, the tendency to treat the universe as a collection of physical objects that can be understood by giving them names. One can see this already in the theories of language of authors like Plato or Augustine, where language is treated as simply a collection of nouns. A theory of language that started from verbs would look quite different. If so, the problem becomes: if the world is a collection of self-identical objects (things to which we have given names), how can anything ever move or change, and this pretty much inevitably means one has to develop some kind of theory of invisible forces and powers lurking behind the surface. For instance: first you imagine objects, and you imagine them as existing outside of time and motion; then you have to bring in "the force of gravity" to move them around—rather than seeing an object's tendencies of motion, and relations with other objects, as an inherent part of the thing itself. Forces thus come to be seen as hidden realities.

Now, this is hardly the only possible way to imagine the world. Other intellectual traditions start out quite differently. But once one has gotten this far, it does rather stand to reason that one will end up seeing those forces mainly either as forces of creation or as forces of destruction. Even if you imagine that a human being is a fixed self-identical object (rather than a process in continual transformation, defined largely by its relations to others) you still have to acknowledge that said human being was once born and will someday inevitably die. Or if you look at the world as a collection of commodities, of chandeliers and candy bars and whatnot, then you at least have to acknowledge that someone made them and that someday they will be eaten, thrown away, melted, compacted, burned up in incinerators, thrown into landfills, or otherwise destroyed. In our society, we like to keep birth, death, manufacture, and waste disposal largely out of sight, but of course that just serves to heighten the sense in which they seem the hidden reality behind things. Obviously, even here, this choice between creative powers and destructive powers makes better sense if we talk about humans and manufactured goods than if we started from rocks and trees, which don't usually have such obvious beginnings and endings, but since the dawn of the industrial age at least, those are the examples we've tended to favor.

Actually, one can see the dichotomy emerge most obviously right around the time of the industrial revolution, corresponding—if only extremely roughly—to the dichotomy between Right and Left political positions that emerged around that time. Nowadays, most of us are familiar with the Left position largely through the works of Marx and Engels—though much of what they said about the importance of productive labor, echoed arguments extremely widespread in radical circles of their day—or perhaps, from various forms of Romanticism. In fact, Marxist theories about labor value, forces of production, and the like are simply the most sophisticated working out of a much more common theme, a concern with creative powers and creative energies that had always been at the center of what came to be known as the Left—a political orientation that, after all, was dedicated to the proposition that since human beings create and recreate the world every day, there is no inherent reason why they should not be able to create one we actually like. Marx himself, for all his contempt for the utopian socialists of his day,[1] never ceased to insist that what makes human beings different from animals is that they can first imagine something, and then try to bring it into being. That act of bringing imaginary visions into being was precisely what he called "production." Utopian socialists like the St. Simonians at the same time were arguing that artists should constitute the political elite—the *avant garde* or "vanguard"—of a new revolutionary social order, providing the grand visions that industrial society now had the power to bring into being. What seemed at the time an odd proposal by an eccentric pamphleteer soon became the charter for a de facto alliance that endures to this day. If artistic avant gardes and social revolutionaries have continued to feel an affinity for one another ever since, as I argued in Chapter 6, it can only be on the basis a commitment to the idea that the ultimate, hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make, and could just as easily make differently.

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[1] Perhaps a bit more nuanced than is sometimes suggested: see Geoghegan 1987. For some recent celebrations of the radical imagination, see Kelley 2002, Duncombe 2007.

To this emphasis on forces of production, of course, the Right tends to reply that revolutionaries systematically neglect the social and historical importance of the "means of destruction": states, armies, executioners, barbarian invasions, criminals, destructive mobs, and so on. Pretending such things are not there, or can simply be wished away, they argue, has the result of ensuring that left-wing regimes will in fact create far more death and destruction than those that have the wisdom to take a more realistic approach.

Like any theoretical schema this is of course a crude simplification. Things are always more complicated. The idea that productive forces were the motor of history was not just a working-class idea. It was, if anything, even more the ideology of the emerging European bourgeoisie. That's one reason why Marx insisted the bourgeoisie was itself a revolutionary force. The Left could never quite figure out how to reconcile the notion of human creativity with the equally attractive idea that the growth of scientific knowledge or some other evolutionary force was itself driving us all to liberation. At the same time, class politics drove most Marxists to conclude that those working on production lines were engaged in value-producing "labor" while most of those who actually envisioned and designed the products were not. Elements of the Right also dabbled with the artistic ideal, particularly with the notion that creative individuals can, through their own inspired powers, reshape history. Contemporary social theory, in turn, arose largely in reaction to conservative critiques of revolutionary thought, focusing on understanding the power all those "realities"—authority, community, hierarchy—that could be said to be real precisely because they resisted attempts to impose some kind of revolutionary vision (Nesbitt 1966, Graeber 2003).

Nonetheless, I think these terms are useful: not only in understanding the nature of revolutionary alliances, but also, in understanding the very nature of social power. This is why I fixed on the terms "imagination" and "violence"—because, it seems to me, these two always seem to interact in predictable, and significant, ways.

On Violence and Imaginative Displacement

When anthropologists and other cultural theorists write about violence, they often make the point that violence operates largely by means of the imagination. Even the most brutal political regimes, for example, intimidate potential opponents much more through terrifying than by actually killing them; most of us have heard about a thousand violent incidents for every one we've actually witnessed. Violence, therefore, is a form of communication, and this, they invariably conclude, is what's ultimately important about it.

Now this is more or less what anyone who takes culture and meaning seriously would really have to say, and I would hardly take issue with most of it. I certainly would not want to argue that violence does not, generally speaking, tend to operate as a form of communication. I would, however, take issue with the last part: "and this is what's ultimately important about it." That violence can be communicative is true, of course. But this could be said of any form of human action. It strikes me that what is really important about violence is that it is perhaps the only form of human action that even holds out the possibility of operating on others *without* being communicative. Or, let me put this more carefully. Violence may well be the only form of human action by which it is possible to have relatively predictable effects on the actions of another person about whom you understand nothing. Pretty much any other way one might try to influence another's actions, one has to have some idea who they think they are, who they think you are, what they might want out of the situation, and a host of similar considerations. Hit them over the head hard enough, and none of this much matters. It's true that the effects one can have simply by hitting them are very limited. They are pretty much limited to preventing them from acting by disabling or killing them. Still, this is something, and any alternative form of action cannot, without some sort of appeal to shared meanings or understandings, have any sort of effects at all. What's more, even attempts to influence another by the threat of violence, which obviously does require some level of shared understandings (at the very least, the other party must understand they are being threatened, and why), requires much less than any alternative. Most human relations—particularly ongoing ones, such as those between longstanding friends or longstanding enemies—are extremely complicated, endlessly dense with experience and meaning. They require a constant and often subtle work of interpretation; each must constantly imagine the other's point of view. Threatening others with physical harm allows the possibility of cutting through all this. It makes possible relations of a far more schematic kind: i.e., "cross this line and I will shoot you and otherwise I really don't care who you are or what you want." This is, for instance, why violence is so often the preferred weapon of the stupid: one could almost say the trump card of the stupid, since it is the form of stupidity to which it is most difficult to come up with any intelligent response.

There is one very important qualification to all of this. The more evenly matched two parties are in their capacity for violence, the less all this tends to be true. If one is involved in a relatively equal contest, it is indeed a very good idea to understand as much as possible about the other side. A military commander for instance will obviously try to get inside his opponent's mind. It's really only when one side has an overwhelming advantage in their capacity to cause physical harm that this ceases to be the case. Of course, when one side has an overwhelming advantage, they rarely have to actually resort to physical attacks: the threat will usually do. But this means, paradoxically, that the most characteristic quality of violence—its capacity to impose very simple social relations that involve little or no imaginative identification—becomes most salient in situations where actual, physical violence is often least likely to occur.

Here let me appeal to the notion of "structural violence": systematic inequalities ultimately backed up by the threat of force. Systems of structural violence invariably produce extreme lopsided structures of imaginative identification. It's not that interpretive work isn't carried out. Society, in any recognizable form, could not operate without it. Rather, the overwhelming burden of the labor is relegated to its victims.

Let me start with an example from that most intimate of settings, the household. One constant staple of 1950s situation comedies in America were jokes about the impossibility of understanding women. The jokes of course were always told by men. Women's logic was always being treated as alien and incomprehensible. One never had the impression, on the other hand, that women had much trouble understanding men. That's because the women had no choice but to understand men. This was the heyday of the patriarchal family, and women with no access to their own income or resources had little choice but to spend a fair amount of time and energy understanding what the relevant men thought was going on. The resultant disparity was simply reproduced in idealized versions of family featured on TV. Actually, this sort of rhetoric about the mysteries of womankind is a perennial feature of patriarchal families: structures that can, indeed, be considered forms of structural violence insofar as the power of men over women within them is, as generations of feminists remind us, ultimately backed up, in sometimes hidden, sometimes not so hidden ways, by the threat of violence. At the same time, generations of female novelists—Virginia Woolf comes immediately to mind—have also documented the other side of this: the constant work women perform in managing, maintaining, and adjusting the egos of apparently oblivious men, which involved an endless work of imaginative identification and what I've called interpretive labor. This carries over on every level. Women are always imagining what things look like from a male point of view. Men almost never do the same for women. This is presumably the reason why in so many societies with a pronounced sexual division of labor, women know a great deal about what men do every day, and men have little or no idea what women do. In fact, many men react to the suggestion of such imaginative identification almost as if it were an act of violence. Most telling in this regard perhaps is an exercise popular among high school creative-writing teachers, who occasionally ask students to write an essay imagining that they've switched genders, and describe what it would be like to live for one day as a member of the opposite sex. Those who have carried out the experiment invariably report exactly the same results: all the girls in class write long and detailed essays demonstrating that they have spent a great deal of time thinking about such questions; roughly half the boys refuse to write the essay entirely.

It should be easy enough to multiply examples. The same thing happens on the micro-level: say, in workplaces. When something goes wrong in a restaurant kitchen, and the boss appears to size things up, he is unlikely to pay much attention to a collection of workers all scrambling to explain what happened. Likely as not he'll tell them all to shut up and just arbitrarily decide what he thinks is likely to have happened: "You're the new guy, you must have messed up. If you do it again, you're fired." It's those who do not have the power to fire who have to do the work of figuring out what actually did go wrong, to ensure that it doesn't happen the next time. Similar things also occur systematically, within society as a whole. It was Adam Smith, oddly enough, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1761), who first made note of what's nowadays labeled "compassion fatigue." Human beings, he observed, appear to have a natural tendency not only to imaginatively identify with their fellows, but also, as a result, to actually feel one another's joys and pains. The poor, however, are just too consistently miserable. Faced with the prospect, observers tend to simply blot them out. The result is that those on the bottom spend a great deal of time imagining the perspectives of, and—human beings being the sympathetic creatures that they are—actually caring about, those on the top, but it almost never happens the other way around.[2] Whatever the mechanisms, this always seems to occur: whether one is dealing with masters and servants, men and women, bosses and workers, rich and poor. Structural inequality—structural violence—invariably creates highly lopsided structures of the imagination. And since I think Smith was right to observe that imagination tends to bring with it sympathy, victims of structural violence do indeed tend to care about their beneficiaries far more than those beneficiaries care about them. In fact, this might well be the single most powerful force preserving such relations—aside from the violence itself.[3]

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[2] I should qualify: it happens much less, and in a much less individualized and realistic fashion. Those with privilege often do evince concern with the downtrodden, but this concern is often generic, and based on near total ignorance of their actual situation. Obviously, this is often true the other way as well, at least, when we are not talking of intimate relations but peasants concerning themselves with affairs at court or people reading celebrity scandal magazines.

A lot of this might seem so obvious that one might wonder why social theorists have not written more about it: particularly considering their endless interest in understanding systems of power and inequality. I suspect one reason is because there just isn't all that much interesting one can say about ignorance and stupidity. Scholars trained in the interpretation of subtle systems of meaning tend to be thrown for something of a loop when confronted with situations that simply aren't very meaningful, or even that are characterized by the radical negation of meaning: the carnage of war for instance, where the continual stream of effectively random (and therefore meaningless) death, trauma, and destruction could be said to create such a vacuum in this regard that it inspires a desperate need on the part of all concerned to infuse the whole affair with some kind of higher significance.[4] Another reason is, of course, the academic fascination with the relation of power and knowledge. Certainly, understanding the degree to which systems of knowledge contribute to systems of domination is something of immediate importance for radical scholars who want to reflect on the ethics of their own practice. One might well argue it would be quite irresponsible not to. At the same time, though, I suspect it encourages academics to believe they have far more power than they really do. It's probably no coincidence that, in America, the fascination with the power/knowledge nexus began in the late 1970s and early 1980s, precisely at the point when many formerly activist scholars found themselves increasingly cut off from social movements and reconciling themselves to a life teaching the children of the bourgeoisie in the academy. Still, this is an ongoing phenomenon. Consider the study of bureaucracy. Why is it that almost all the major social theorists who have written about bureaucratic forms of organization, from Max Weber to Michel Foucault, all seem to assume that bureaucracies actually work—despite the fact that almost everyone else in the world, including most bureaucrats, are under the impression that the most salient features of such forms of organization are their idiocy and incompetence? Actually, in my terms, it might not even be fair to say that bureaucracies are forms of stupidity and ignorance. It's more that bureaucracies tend to be ways of

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[3] While I am drawing on a broad range of feminist theory here, the most important is "Standpoint Theory"; the key works to consult here are Patricia Hill Collins, Donna Haraway, Sandra Harding, and Nancy Harstock. See Harstock 2004 for a good collection.

[4] One might call this significance without meaning. To have one's arm blown off is obviously extremely significant; at least for the person who will have to live without an arm for the rest of his life. However, the blowing off of the arm was almost certainly not a meaningful action: the shell was not directed against him specifically, he just by sheer random luck happened to be standing in the wrong place at the wrong time. There was no reason whatsoever why it hit him rather than a dozen other people.

managing situations that are already stupid, or at any rate marked by systematic ignorance, because they are products (usually) of massive structural inequality, and (almost always) the state's monopoly of "force."

Bureaucratic knowledge is, of course, all about schematization. In practice, bureaucratic procedure invariably means ignoring all the subtleties of real human existence and reducing everything to simple pre-established mechanical or statistical formulae. Whether it's a matter of forms, rules, statistics, or questionnaires, it's always a matter of simplification. Usually, it's not so different than the boss who walks in to make an arbitrary, snap decision as to what went wrong: it's a matter of applying very simple templates to complex, ambiguous situations. In this, it's a little bit like social theory itself. An ethnographic description, even a very good one, captures at best two percent of what's actually going on in any particular Nuer feud or Balinese cockfight. A theoretical reflection will normally focus on only a tiny part of *that*, plucking one or two strands out of an endlessly complex tissue of human circumstance, and using it as the basis on which to make generalizations, say, about the nature of war or about the nature of ritual. I am not saying I am against engaging in this kind of theoretical reflection (in fact I'm doing it right now): I certainly believe that by such simplification, one can learn things about the world one would not have been able to learn otherwise. Still, when one turns from description to policy and reapplies these sorts of simplifications to the real world, the results are likely to leave those forced to deal with bureaucratic administration with the impression that they are dealing with people who have, for some arbitrary reason, decided to put on a strange set of glasses that only allows them to see only two percent of what's in front of them.

It's at this point we can return to the police, who I have already described as armed, low-level administrators: as bureaucrats with guns. In terms of what I've been saying, it is hardly surprising that they are most likely to resort to violence when one challenges their right to define a situation. The police are the point where the state's monopoly of the legitimate use of coercive force takes flesh; where any number of forms of structural violence turn into the real thing. If violence is a force capable of radically simplifying complex social situations, if bureaucracy is largely a method of imposing such simplistic rubrics systematically, then bureaucratic violence should, logically, consist first and foremost of attacks on those who insist on alternative interpretations. At the same time, such enforcement can be seen as "stupidity" in its most literal sense. Jean Piaget's theory of the development of intelligence in children, for example, defines intelligence as the ability to coordinate between different points of view. Small children find it difficult to understand even, say, that a house would look different if seen from another perspective, or that if I have a brother named George, then George also has a brother who is me. Intellectual development thus becomes a matter of being able to take account of every possible perspective on a situation. Moral intelligence is of course just another version of the same thing. In this sense, first imposing a single authoritative perspective, and then threatening to strike anyone who proposes an alternative one with a large stick, is the very definition of militant stupidity.

Anarchist practice—particularly the practice of consensus decision-making—tends to make a veritable moral imperative of the need to integrate incommensurable perspectives. Where nineteenth century anarchists like Kropotkin (1909, 1924) proposed that imagination—by which he meant, imaginative identification—was the basis of morality, one might say that this is an attempt to actually turn it into some kind of actual institutional structure. This is not to say that the average anarchist meeting involves elaborate exercises in seeing things from other's points of view—in fact, the emphasis on shared projects of action makes it possible to largely side step such exercises, which are left for "trainings" and other educational events—but it presumes respect for incommensurable perspectives. This is why activists find dealing with representatives of the police state (as they call it) so dismaying. The line of riot cops is not only the point where structural violence takes tangible shape: it also, for that very reason, creates a kind of imaginative wall, a barrier it is impossible for the mind to penetrate. This might seem to contradict my earlier point that it's the beneficiaries of structural violence who tend to become the objects of identification, but I don't think it really does. After all, the police are not themselves beneficiaries of structural violence. In the case of say, a trade summit, the beneficiaries are the politicians and executives. The police are caught precisely in the middle; they are quite literally the wall between bankers and victims. Hence, the strange ambivalence of their position. In fact, the public is constantly invited, in a thousand TV shows and movies, to imagine the world from a police officer's perspective, but it's always the point of view of imaginary police officers, maverick cops who spend their time fighting crime rather than solving administrative problems or manning barricades. As police often bitterly remark, they know nothing about real cops, and mostly, do not wish to have anything to do with them.

EXCURSUS ON TRANSCENDENT VERSUS IMMANENT IMAGINATION

The reader might well be wondering, at this point, whether I am playing a bit fast and loose with my terminology—moving back and forth, in fact, between two completely different meanings of the word "imagination." In the first section, I was talking about the role of imagination in bringing new things into being, whether new material objects, new social arrangements, or revolutionary visions of a profoundly new society. In the second, I was discussing sympathetic identification; imagining how things look through another's point of view. What reason is there to suppose these two have anything significant in common?

I think they do, but to understand why I think so, it is helpful to consider the history of the word "imagination." As Agamben (1993), among others, have pointed out, in the common Ancient and Medieval conception, what we call "the imagination" was considered the zone of passage between reality and reason. Perceptions from the material world had to pass through the imagination, becoming emotionally charged in the process and mixing with all sorts of phantasms, before the rational mind could grasp their significance. Intentions and desires moved in the opposite direction. It's only after Descartes, really, that the word "imaginary" came to mean, specifically, anything that is not real: imaginary creatures, imaginary places (Middle Earth, Narnia, planets in faraway Galaxies, the Kingdom of Prester John), imaginary friends. By this definition, of course, a "political ontology of the imagination" is actually a contradiction in terms. The imagination cannot be the basis of reality. It is by definition that which we can think, but isn't real.

I will refer to this latter meaning as "the transcendent notion of the imagination" since it seems to set out from stories and other fictional texts that create imaginary worlds that, presumably, remain the same no matter how many times one reads them. Imaginary creatures—elves or unicorns—are not affected by the real world. They cannot be, because they don't exist. However, neither of the two usages of imagination I've been using so far are anything like this. In many ways they seem holdovers from the older, immanent conception. Most of all, they are in no sense static and free-floating, but are entirely caught up in projects of action that aim to have real effects on the material world. The first one is mainly a moment in the process of creating or shaping physical objects. The second is more a moment in the process of creating and maintaining social relations. Still, any adequate notion of production—or care, or work, or human creativity, or whatever you care to call it—must necessarily aim to understand both: if nothing else because most real forms of production, or care, or work, are not limited to simply one or to the other.

I suspect the core problem here is the term "labor," which always seems to refer, as its primary example, to factory work. For Marx, as for most other thinkers in the nineteenth-century workers' movement, "labor" and "production" were key categories most of all because they brought home the paradox that human beings lived in a world that they had collectively created and continued to create—despite the fact that almost none of them felt they had much control of the process, or that, if they had, they would not have chosen to make a world that looked much like this. The institution of wage labor, that forced workers to sell their very powers of creativity, seemed the most dramatic and most profound form of this general condition of alienation. However, the resulting focus on factory labor as the model for all others seems to me to have created a very skewed conception of what work, for most people, is actually like. Political economy, for example, sets out from an extreme dichotomy between workplace and home. The first is the place of production; the second that of consumption. This already assumes what's really important is manufactured goods. But even if one then draws attention to the importance of domestic labor, this tends to produce a very simplistic dichotomy between the workplace, as the place where material goods are produced by (mostly male) wage laborers, and the household, as the place where those goods are maintained (polished, swept, cleaned) by unpaid women, and most of all, as the place for the care, nurture, and education of human beings. It is commonplace nowadays (e.g., Negri 1984) to say that things have since become more complicated, and that, therefore, old-fashioned Victorian theories of labor value no longer apply. This is nonsense. Things were always more complicated. Certainly there has never been a society in human history in which the majority of the population was made up of industrial workers and housewives. To open up a description of working class life in a European city of Marx's day—say, a novel by Charles Dickens or Victor Hugo—is to be instantly confronted with an endless series of characters whose work obviously doesn't fit either category: chimney sweeps, wet nurses, hansom cab operators, prostitutes, sailors, governesses, barbers, rag-pickers, scriveners, police. Most of us are well aware of this. Nonetheless, when speaking in the abstract, we tend to revert to the same simplistic categories. We tend to act as if "labor" means *either* operations on the physical world (making or maintaining things) *or*, if we're feeling expansive about the term, operations on the social world (making or maintaining relations with other people—or working directly on their bodies or their minds), and not both at the same time. Some may go on to celebrate "production" as the essence of what makes us human, and relegate forms of labor directed at other people (housework, childcare, education) to the lower sphere of "reproduction." Others may follow Hannah Arendt (1958) and see politics—attempts to sway or influence other human beings—as the essence of what makes us human, and thus relegate "production" to the second rank. But these are always assumed to be distinct domains of human activity.

In reality, work, like any other form of human activity, usually tends to involve a bit of both—as Marx himself noted when he pointed out, in *The German Ideology*, that "production" of material needs is always at the same time the production of people and social relations. It's true that industrial capitalism is unusual in marking off a separate sphere for the fashioning of material commodities. It's also true that doing so tends to exacerbate certain contradictory tendencies regarding the relation between work and imagination: that is, that when inequalities emerge in the sphere of material production, it's usually those on top that relegate to themselves the more imaginative tasks (i.e., they design the products and organize the shop floor),[5] whereas when the same thing happens in the sphere of social production, it's those on the bottom who end up expected to do the major imaginative work (for example, the bulk of what I've called the "labor of interpretation" that keeps life running). No doubt all this makes it easier to see the two as fundamentally different sorts of activity. But, in any larger view of society, it's obvious that this cannot be the case, and, insofar as a distinction can be made here, it's the care, energy, and labor directed at human beings that must be considered primary. The things that we care most about—our loves, passions, rivalries, obsessions—are always other people; in most societies it's taken for granted that the manufacture of material goods is a subordinate moment in a larger process of fashioning (proper sorts of) human beings.

On Alienation

The problem, perhaps, is that, with the word "labor" so slanted by its associations with factory work, there is no term that can easily combine the fundamental insight that the world is largely something we have made, and that we've made it, largely, in the process of projects aimed at shaping other people. Probably we need to begin developing a new language, in which what's typically considered "women's work" is seen as the primary form of labor, and other forms merely variants. For now, I really want to make three points. The first is that once we stop thinking of the imagination as largely about the production of free-floating fantasy worlds, but rather as bound up in the processes by which we make and maintain reality, then it makes perfect sense to see it as a material force in the world—or, anyway, at least as much as violence. Creativity and desire (what we often reduce, in political economy terms, to "production" and "consumption") are essentially vehicles of the imagination. The second is that structures of inequality and domination tend to skew this process in any number of different ways. They can create situations where most workers are relegated to mind-numbing, boring, mechanical jobs and only a small elite is allowed to indulge in imaginative labor. They can create social situations where kings, politicians, or celebrities prance about oblivious to almost everything around them while their wives, servants, staff, and handlers spend all their time engaged in the imaginative work of maintaining them in their fantasies. Most situations of inequality combine elements of both. The third is that the subjective experience of living inside such lopsided structures of imagination is precisely what we are referring to when we talk about "alienation."

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[5] It's not entirely clear to me how much this is a general pattern, or how much it is a peculiar feature of capitalism.

This might help explain both why the politics of alienation still maintains such hold on young activists, long after most social theorists have abandoned the concept, and why a politics rooted in the imagination seems like the obvious antidote. I have already noted the peculiar paradox that while academics remain fascinated with French theory from the years following May '68, much of it directly or indirectly grappling with the question of why revolutionary dreams seemed to have proved themselves impossible, anarchists and other activists are still reading, and developing, French theory from immediately before, such as Guy Debord (1967), Raoul Vaneigem (1967), or Cornelius Castoriadis (1967). The Situationists in particular were the great theorists of the power of alienation in everyday life (Castoriadis, in turn, was the great theorist of the revolutionary imagination). If Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, a book written in Paris in 1967, can still seem to give voice to the frustration felt by a teenager in Nebraska, it can only be because it's a book that sets out from feeling the rage, boredom, and revulsion almost any adolescent at some point feels when confronted with middle-class existence, and turns it into Theory. The sense of a life broken into fragments, with no ultimate meaning or integrity; of a cynical market system selling its victims commodities and spectacles that themselves represent tiny false images of the very sense of totality and pleasure and community the market has destroyed; the tendency to turn every relation into a form of exchange, to sacrifice life for "survival," pleasure for renunciation, creativity for hollow homogenous units of power or "dead time"—on some level all this clearly still rings true.

Academics, on the other hand, will normally respond that to say that there is something unnatural, or inhuman, about capitalism is to assume there is some kind of natural, human essence to compare it to. Any theory of alienation assumes there is some essential human nature, some kind of essential self, that is being frustrated, unrealized, or denied. Almost all post-structuralist theory would reject this logic out of hand; it's resolutely anti-humanist. This is a powerful argument. On what possible basis could we argue that some human societies are more human than others? But the result is strangely depoliticizing. Or perhaps it would be better to say that the result seems to lead to a liberal politics in which, if one can talk about "alienation" at all, it could only be as the subjective experience of marginalization or exclusion. This is pretty much the direction taken by what's now often referred to as "postmodern" alienation theory (e.g., Geyer 1992, Geyer & Heinz 1996; Schmidt & Moody 1994), in which alienation is said to occur largely when one's self-definition clashes with the way one is defined or categorized within the larger society. Alienation thus becomes the subjective manner in which various forms of oppression (racism, sexism, ageism, etc.) are actually experienced and internalized by their victims. This might seem a useful corrective to the Situationist or indeed classic Marxist literature, which has almost nothing to say about structures of exclusion. As students will always point out when reading Situationist literature nowadays, they had almost nothing to say about racism, sexism, or homophobia. Still, it seems to me, perverse though it may sound, that is precisely what's so powerful about their work. If we imagine capitalism as a game, then it is one thing to bewail the fate of the losers, or to point out that most players will lose, or even that the rules are written so unfairly that certain categories of player are bound to lose. It is quite another to say that the game destroys the souls even of those who win. To say the latter is to say the game is simply pointless. Even the prize is bad. The first line of argument can lead to a reformist politics calling for greater inclusion—or it could, conceivably, lead to a revolutionary politics of class war (or, presumably, racial or ethnic or even gender war), but only the second allows for the possibility of a politics that is both revolutionary, and that leads to universal liberation. This is not, it seems to me, the sort of vision revolutionaries should wish to give up without an extremely compelling reason, and it's hardly surprising that so many—particularly those who do not come from any obviously oppressed group—do not find post-structuralist critiques of the subject compelling enough.[6]

How to salvage such a vision? I think some of the ideas I've been trying to develop over the course of this chapter might be useful. If alienation is simply the subjective experience of living inside the warped structures of imagination that forms of social inequality always seem to produce, then most of the conventional objections to the concept dissolve away. After all, what does it mean to say that there is no such thing as an essential human nature or "transcendental subject?" One is saying that these things are imaginary. Precisely. And what is wrong with that?[7] One could well argue that if there is any human essence, it is precisely our capacity to imagine that we have one. This, in turn, would not be very far at all from Marx's starting point: that if there is anything essentially human, it's the capacity to imagine things and bring them into being (what I've been calling immanent imagination), and that alienation occurs when we lose control over the process.

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[6] Obviously, this then leads back to the problem I noted in Chapter 6: despite this, no one is going to argue that the despair of a rich white man at realizing his life is meaningless is quite equivalent to that of the mother of a Mozambiquan child who is dying of a preventable disease. Alienation and oppression are not equivalents. But they do suggest all would benefit to some degree from a better world.

[7] Actually, as it happens, most post-structural theory tends to look with a jaundiced eye even at imaginary totalities—a tendency which traces back to Lacan's notion of "specularity" and the mirror stage, the infant's first creation of a unitary sense of self which is always constructed around some exterior object. Lacan refers to this kind of logic as "the imaginary" and juxtaposes it to the more mature "symbolic" stage that arrives with language. The tendency to discount the imaginary and the specular as basically infantile recurs throughout Lacan's work. The Situationists, in seeing the spectacle and the commodity form as imaginary totalities, desired to compensate for the lack of any sense of wholeness or community in everyday life, are clearly drawing on this same sort of logic but they are sufficiently wedded to the dialectical tradition that unity, wholeness, are seen as good things. Starting at least with Deleuze and Guattari, dialectics and totality are definitively rejected as values; the model instead is the self as nexus of "flows." At any rate from the perspective developed here, it's easy to see that all this literature assumes transcendental imaginaries and not immanent ones: these totalities are seen as free-floating,

If imagination is indeed a constituent element in the process of how we produce our social and material realities, there is every reason to believe that it proceeds through producing images of totality.[8] That's simply how the imagination works. One must be able to imagine oneself and others as integrated subjects in order to be able to produce beings that are in fact endlessly multiple; imagine some sort of coherent, bounded "society" in order to produce that chaotic, open-ended network of social relations that actually exists. There is a contradiction here, perhaps, but most people in human history seem to have figured out a way to live with it. It does not ordinarily spark feelings of rage and despair, the perception that the social world is a hollow travesty or malicious joke. If, in capitalist societies, it often does, it can only be because of the peculiar intensity of the forms of structural violence it creates, and the warping and shattering of the imagination that are their inevitable effect.

What is it that can allow a teenager from Nebraska, brought up in a thoroughly capitalist society, to see capitalist social relations as somehow unnatural, inhuman, as inimical to life? Is it because capitalist society necessarily generates structures of the imagination that suggest something beyond it, even as it denies them any meaningful life? Or is it because "capitalist society" does not actually exist, is not itself a totality, because capitalism is simply parasitical on the vast imaginative labor that creates families, friendships, inventions, commitments, ideas, and forms of cooperation; labor that, in its workings, is always generating utopian images against which capitalism must necessarily seem dreary, brutal, oppressive, cruel? To some extent, no doubt, it's both these things. They're all ultimately rooted in the same tension: the fact that, to reproduce itself, capitalism, however defined, must create not just images of freedom on which it can never actually deliver, but pockets of genuine autonomy.

ON REVOLUTION

The Situationist solution to the problem of alienation was revolutionary action: the creation of "situations" where one could subvert the logic of the Spectacle and recapture one's own imaginative powers. It was a call for the reinvention of daily life on the principle of direct action, and was ultimately to culminate in a

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completely detached from the world, rather than as moments in a process of action or creation.

[8] I have already made this case in a book called *Toward Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (Graeber 2001), Chapter 3.

general insurrection against all forms of institutional authority, from capitalists to labor bureaucrats. It's easy to see why this vision has proved so appealing to generations of subsequent activists, and particularly anarchists. The biggest difference between their perspectives and those of contemporary avatars like the CrimethInc collective is that the latter have largely abandoned any faith that that final insurrectionary moment is likely to happen any time soon. If the events of May '68 revealed anything, it was that, if one is not trying to seize state power, then insurrectionary moments are going to have a different meaning and different effects—it's no longer possible to imagine them as representing a fundamental permanent break that will usher in a completely new society. (In a way, of course, this is only a realization of something that was always true.) We are left instead with an open-ended struggle, the realization that we are, effectively, already in a situation of permanent revolution. Freedom becomes the struggle itself.

This may seem like a sobering prospect compared with the heady days of '68, when the skies seemed ready to open at a moment's notice, but it does carry with it one major consolation. It means one can begin to experience genuine freedom, even to create liberated territories, in the here and now. As Vaneigem was always keen to remind us, the very idea that it is the responsibility of the revolutionary to sacrifice all pleasure and fulfillment in the selflessly efficient pursuit of "the revolution" is itself just a mirror image of the logic of capitalism. Now one can actually begin to experiment with other ways of being. Certainly, the project is not without its contradictions and dilemmas. Much of this book has been taken up in exploring them. Still, it is possible to argue it ultimately represents an attitude more mature (in the sense of willing to take responsibility for its own actions), than that of those who felt they were agents of the inevitable unfolding of History.

Consider the following statement from the CrimethInc collective:

> We must make our freedom by cutting holes in the fabric of this reality, by forging new realities which will, in turn, fashion us. Putting yourself in new situations constantly is the only way to ensure that you make your decisions unencumbered by the inertia of habit, custom, law, or prejudice—and it is up to you to create these situations.
>
> Freedom only exists in the moment of revolution. And those moments are not as rare as you think. Change, revolutionary change, is going on constantly and everywhere—and everyone plays a part in it, consciously or not (CrimethInc 2003).

What is this but an elegant statement of the logic of direct action: the defiant insistence on acting as if one is already free. The obvious question is how it can contribute to an overall strategy, one that should lead to a cumulative movement towards a world without states and capitalism. No one is completely sure. Most assume it can only be a matter of endless improvisation. Insurrectionary moments there will certainly be. Likely as not, quite a few of them.

In retrospect, what seems strikingly naïve is the old assumption that a single uprising or successful civil war could, as it were, neutralize the entire apparatus of structural violence—at least within a particular national territory—that right-wing realities could be simply swept away, to leave the field open for an untrammeled outpouring of revolutionary creativity. But the truly puzzling thing is that, at certain moments of human history, that appeared to be exactly what was happening. It seems to me that if we are to have any chance of grasping the new, emerging conception of revolution, we need to begin by thinking again about the quality of these insurrectionary moments, when people felt they were in the presence of the Revolution, properly speaking.

One of the most remarkable things about insurrectionary moments is how they can seem to burst out of nowhere—and then, often, just as quickly dissolve away. How is it that the same "public" that, two months before, say, the Paris Commune or Spanish Civil War, had voted in a fairly moderate social-democratic regime will suddenly find themselves willing to risk their lives for the same ultra-radicals who received a fraction of the actual vote? Or, to return to May '68, how is it that the same public that seemed to support or at least feel strongly sympathetic toward the student-worker uprising could, almost immediately afterwards, return to the polls and elect a right-wing government? The most common historical explanations—that the revolutionaries didn't really represent the public or its interests, but that elements of the public perhaps became caught up in some sort of irrational effervescence—seem obviously inadequate. First of all, they assume that "the public" is an entity with opinions, interests, and allegiances assumed to be relatively consistent over time. In fact, what we call "the public" is created, produced, through specific institutions that allow specific forms of action—taking polls, watching television, voting, signing petitions or writing letters to elected officials or attending public hearings—and not others. These frames of action imply certain ways of talking, thinking, arguing, deliberating. The same "public" that may widely indulge in the use of recreational chemicals may also consistently vote to make such indulgences illegal; the same collection of citizens are likely to make completely different decisions on questions affecting their communities if organized into a parliamentary system, a system of computerized plebiscites, or a system of direct democracy. In fact, the entire anarchist project of reinventing direct democracy is premised on assuming this is the case.

To illustrate what I mean, consider that even in America, the exact same collection of people can be referred to in one context as "the public" and, in another, as "the workforce." They become a "workforce," of course, when they are engaged in different sorts of activity. The "public" does not work—at least, a sentence like "most of the American public work in the service industry" would not appear in a magazine or newspaper. This is especially odd since the public does, in fact, have to *go* to work: this is why, as leftist critics often complain, the media will always talk about how, say, a transport strike is likely to inconvenience the public, in their capacity of commuters, but it will never occur to them that those striking are themselves part of the public, or that whether if they succeed in raising wage levels this will be a public benefit. And certainly the "public" does not go out into the streets. Aside from its role, noted earlier, as audience to some sort of public Spectacle, it mainly appears as consumers of public services. When buying or using privately (instead of publicly) supplied goods and services, the same collection of individuals becomes "consumers"—just as, in other contexts of action, it is relabeled a "nation," an "electorate," a "population."

All these entities are the product of institutions and institutional practices that, in turn, define certain horizons of possibility. Hence, when voting in parliamentary elections, one might feel obliged to make a "realistic" choice; in an insurrectionary situation, on the other hand, suddenly anything seems possible.

A great deal of recent revolutionary thought essentially asks: what, then, does this mass of people become during such insurrectionary moments? For the last few centuries, the conventional answer has been "the people," an entity claimed to now hold the power once held by kings, even if it only seems to exercise that power fully in moments of insurrection. It is often noted that the legitimacy of modern constitutional orders—which always claimed to be founded on the will of "the people"—actually traces back to moments when the people rose up in arms to overthrow whatever legally constituted order had existed before. Still, as a number of radical thinkers began pointing out, "the people," as a paradigm, was always something of a problem for that very reason. It is imagined as a bounded, homogenous mass of individuals—basically, the raw material for a nation-state. What's more, as Toni Negri (1992) noted it seems to have an inevitable tendency to bureaucratize itself. Outbursts of popular creativity are always followed by a process of institutionalization, the creation of some sort of apparatus—the writing of constitutions, convocation of parliaments, development of rules and formal processes—that always seems to end up blotting out whatever it was that made that popular creativity possible—even as it also claims it as its ultimate source of legitimacy. Was it possible to imagine a fundamentally different sort of Revolutionary Subject? It was with this problem in mind that Negri, followed by a number of other French and Italian thinkers (Negri 1991, etc, Virno 2004, also Montag, Moulier, Balibar) returned to the political literature of seventeenth-century Europe and seized on the notion of "the Multitude." In this new reading, "the Multitude" becomes everything "the people" is not. It is an open-ended network of "singularities," a shifting mix of affinities, alliances, and above all, forms of cooperation, united by their common opposition to state and capital. In Europe in particular, activists have found this a very appealing notion. It is certainly much more amenable to the tacit philosophy of direct action: for example, in its assumption that such popular forces can never be reduced to a single perspective, a single logic, a single consciousness, nor should they; or its willingness to look to forms of radical freedom already emerging within the folds of capitalism. Still, in the terms I've been trying to develop in this chapter, all this rather misses the point. The point is not to define the thing and give it a name. It is first and foremost to understand the relevant structures and frames of action.

In the terms I've been developing, what "the public," "the workforce," "consumers," "population" all have in common is that they are brought into being by institutionalized frames of action that are inherently bureaucratic and, therefore, profoundly alienating. Voting booths, television screens, office cubicles, hospitals, the ritual that surrounds them—one might say these are the very machinery of alienation. They are the instruments through which the human imagination is smashed and shattered. Insurrectionary moments occur when this bureaucratic apparatus is neutralized. Doing so always seems to have the effect of throwing horizons of possibility wide open. This is only to be expected if one of the main things that apparatus normally does is to enforce extremely limited ones. (This is probably why, as Rebecca Solnit (2005) has observed, people often experience something very similar during natural disasters.) Such moments also seem to unleash the human imagination: at least, revolutionary moments always seem to be followed by an outpouring of creativity—social, artistic, and intellectual. Again, this is not really all that surprising if their main effect is to destroy existing frameworks; one would expect such destruction be followed by a vast outpouring of improvisation from all sides. Normally unequal structures of imaginative identification are disrupted; everyone is experimenting with trying to imagine unfamiliar points of view. Normally unequal structures of creativity are disrupted; everyone feels not only the right, but (since revolutions bring every sort of emergency) the immediate practical need to recreate and re-imagine everything around them. It's understandable that someone who lives through such a moment might experience it as the destruction of artificial boundaries and a reversion to a more natural state of being—one where everyone is able to recuperate their own imaginative powers. In part because this is not entirely untrue.

If things are more complicated, it's of course because what happens doesn't happen to individuals. It's a social process. In fact, to a large extent, it is a stripping away of those social constraints that, paradoxically, define us as isolated individuals. After all, for authors ranging from Kierkegaard to Durkheim, the alienation that is the condition of modern life is not the experience of constraints at all, but its very opposite. "Alienation" is the anxiety and despair we face when presented with an almost infinite range of choices, in the absence of any larger moral structures through which to make them meaningful. From an activist perspective, though, this is simply another effect of institutionalized frameworks: most of all, this is what happens when we are used to imagining ourselves primarily as consumers. In the absence of the market, it would be impossible to conceive of "freedom" as a series of choices made in isolation; instead, freedom can only mean the freedom to choose what kind of commitments one wishes to make to others, and, of course, the experience of living under only those constraints one has freely chosen. Here, I would refer back to Jessica's remark during the consensus training in Chapter 7, on the oddly pleasurable sensation of deciding one's own opinion is not that important. Giving way to the judgment of a larger group can actually be experienced as freedom, as long as one knows one doesn't have to—that one could withdraw one's consent at any time. At any rate, just as during moments of revolution institutionalized structures of statecraft are dissolved into public assemblies and institutionalized structures of labor control melt into self-management, so do consumer markets give way to conviviality and collective celebration. Spontaneous insurrections are almost always experienced by those taking part as carnivals; an experience that those planning mass actions—as we've seen—are often quite self-consciously trying to reproduce. Obviously, none of this is a simple reversion to a state of nature. New social relations have to be improvised and produced, and doing so tends to involve its own kind of (again, often half-conscious) fetishism[9], of which puppets and spells are only the most obvious examples. It's hardly coincidental that so many Primitivists, who are the most rigorous in their rejection of any possible form of alienation, and who really do believe it's possible to revert to a state of nature, do not disguise their contempt for puppets as useless frippery. They are much more interested in the symbolic power of smashing frames than with building them up again. ("The urge for destruction is also a creative urge.") Still, as I've said, this is the moment where one comes face to face with the power of collective creativity, which, for activists, is the very basis of the Real—and which, like any ultimate power in an anarchist cosmology has to be simultaneously awesome and ridiculous.

All this makes it easier to see why some might consider the whole project of giving a name to the revolutionary "multitude," and then beginning to look for the dynamic forces that lie behind it, as the first step of that very process of institutionalization that must eventually kill the very thing in whose name it would wish to speak. Subjects (publics, peoples, workforces) are created by specific institutional structures, that are essentially frameworks for action. They are what they do. What revolutionaries do is to break those frames to create new horizons of possibility—an act that then allows a radical restructuring of the social imagination. This is perhaps the one form of action that cannot, by definition, be institutionalized. As the Colectivo Situaciones in Argentina has suggested, it might be better to speak here not of constituent but of destituent power.

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[9] At least, so I have argued in the past (Graeber 2006).

If there is a way to institutionalize this experience, this giddy realignment of imaginative powers, it is precisely through the experience of direct action. This is, after all, what those who organize festivals of resistance are quite intentionally trying to bring about: everything that is most powerful in the experience of spontaneous insurrection. The effect, though, is as if things are happening in reverse. In the case of an insurrection, one begins with battles in the streets, outpourings of popular effervescence and festivity. Then one moves on to the sober business of creating new institutions, councils, decision-making processes, and ultimately the reinvention of everyday life. At least, such is the ideal, and there have been many moments in human history where something like that has begun to happen—though such spontaneous creations always seems to end being subsumed within some new form of bureaucratic state. The direct action movement, one might say, proceeds precisely in the other direction. Often, the participants get involved through subcultures that are all about reinventing everyday life. Even if not, one starts from the development of new forms of decision making—councils, assemblies, "process"—and uses them to plan the street actions and popular festivities. Part I of this book provides a detailed account of such an effort, one which did, in fact, culminate in a near-insurrectionary situation, a kind of modest popular uprising in working-class neighborhoods of the city of Québec. Still, no one involved seriously considered the possibility that they might trigger the Revolution in the traditional messianic sense. Even those who labor to create the conditions for insurrection do not see them as making fundamental breaks in reality, but more as something almost along the lines of momentary advertisements—or better, foretastes, experiences of visionary inspiration—for a much slower, painstaking effort to create alternatives.

It's here I would emphasize above all the influence of feminism. Historically, the contemporary anarchist emphasis on process emerged—as I observed in Chapter 5—more than anything else from organizational crises in feminist collectives in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This is what finally drove organizers to begin looking seriously at Quaker practice, and, eventually, developing the whole apparatus of affinity groups, spokescouncils, consensus, and facilitation. Even more, one can see the emphasis of feminism in the whole direction of the movement. "Situations" do not create themselves. There's an enormous amount of work involved. For much of human history, of course, what has been taken as politics has consisted of a series of theatrical stages, and dramatic performances carried out upon them. One of the great gifts of feminism to political thought has been to continually remind us of the people making and preparing and cleaning those stages and, even more, maintaining the invisible structures that make them possible—who have, overwhelmingly, been women. The normal process of politics is to make all these people disappear. One might say that one impact of feminism on direct action circles has been to foster a new political ideal that aims to efface the difference. To put it another way, this new ideal insists that action is only genuinely revolutionary when the process of production of situations is just as liberating as the situations themselves. The entire process becomes an experiment, one might say, in the realignment of imagination, in the creation of truly non-alienated forms of experience.

The obvious problem is that, while those operating in the wake of a successful insurrection are operating in the temporary absence of state power, those employing direct action strategies are not. As we've seen, this makes things infinitely complicated. Embedded structures of oppression—race, class, gender—also take a considerable toll. The common pattern of exaltation and burn-out that activists so often experience seems related to this. Those drawn into the movement tend to react first with a sense of wonder, of almost infinite horizons, on discovering that radically egalitarian forms of organization are possible, then, a growing exhaustion in the face of state repression, and a growing sense of exasperation as they discover the endless petty troubles, subtle forms of domination, and dilemmas of privilege that still endure. Still, there are ways in which the existence of larger structures of domination is actually an advantage. They keep one from forgetting why one got involved to begin with. As I emphasized in Chapter 7, activist practice is largely defined, and continually refined, in relation to the experience of hierarchical alternatives. While putting together this book, for example, I was talking with one of the activists who had been most fervently involved in the DAN Women's Caucus, and was surprised to discover that most now felt their objections had been overblown. "I don't think DAN was really sexist," Marina remarked to me. "We probably made more of an issue out of all that than we really should have." Considering the passion of the debates at the time, I found this a bit surprising. But then, most had since gone on to union jobs, or graduate school, and DAN was probably looking far better in retrospect.

The one way that structures of domination really do make the project difficult is precisely in the realm of the imagination: above all, in the chokehold of mainstream media. Political ontologies of violence dominate popular discourse as never before. Worse, most Americans are unaware that a movement dedicated to transforming the world through direct action even exists. Insofar as they are, it would be impossible to develop any broad sense of what they're about—unless, that is, they were willing to literally spend days surfing the Internet. Actions need to be experienced before the work of "contaminationism" can actually find effect—and, while there's reason to believe this is slowly happening, that social movements of this sort have been transforming the experience of daily life across the world in countless, very important ways (here feminism is certainly the most dramatic example) the institutional structures prove surprisingly difficult to build in any enduring way. The infrastructure remains embryonic.

On Terror

I thought I might end, then, with a few words about global politics. Perhaps some of these terms can provide a fresh perspective on recent historical events. So far, I have largely avoided discussing the significance of September 11 and the subsequent "war on terror," other than to remark that any attempt to return to the kind of full-scale war mobilization typical of the period between 1914 and 1989 was unlikely to succeed. Let me try to be a little more specific about what I think is the larger historical context. This is tricky, as history is moving rapidly and social theorists tend to be notoriously bad at predicting the future—for all I know the world situation will have transformed dramatically in the one or two years before this book actually comes to print. Still, some things are clear enough. The first is that the movement described in this book is just one very small element of what might be called a vast global uprising against neoliberalism; one that might be traced back to the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas in 1994, and which first struck American shores in a significant way in Seattle in November 1999. While only a scattered minority of participants ever called themselves "anarchists," principles developed in the anarchist tradition—the rejection of strategies based on ending state power, the development of new forms of direct democracy, principles of horizontality, associationalism, autonomy, self-organization, and mutual aid—made this the largest self-conscious flowering of anarchist ideas in history. It quickly developed in an explicitly anti-capitalist direction. It was also startlingly effective. If it began to run into problems, it was—much as in the case of the similarly organized antinuclear campaigns in the 1970s—because they achieved their immediate goals much faster than anyone involved had really anticipated. It's a tribute to the success of the movement that most of us have already forgotten the kind of rhetoric being thrown about in the late 1990s: that super-charged free-market capitalism was now proven to be the only possible way to do anything; that "free trade" and "free markets" were inexorable, but also revolutionary forces; that anyone who disagreed with any part of this program could be treated as almost literally insane. It's also hard to remember any previous time when politicians and media pundits had reached such an absolute consensus. Speaking as someone who first became involved in the movement in the immediate aftermath of Seattle, I can assure the reader that, in early 2000, almost no one I knew in DAN imagined they would be able to destroy this Washington Consensus in one or two years. Most of us assumed it would probably take a decade. Instead, the whole apparatus instantly collapsed.

What seems to have happened is that global elites panicked and, when global elites panic, their usual instinct is to start a war. It doesn't really matter who the war is directed against. The point is that war changes the rules of engagement with one's domestic opponents. Radicals find their moderate allies become terrified of appearing unpatriotic; most abandon their coalitions; opposition political parties feel forced to adopt the war agenda; the populace is far more willing to tolerate the violent suppression of dissent. All of this happened in 1914, and the formula worked so well it was maintained, in one form or another (World War, Cold War) until 1989 or 1991. Since then, it's as if history has been replaying again in a very fast cycle. The anarchists reappeared; the resultant global movement was extraordinarily effective in terrifying the capitalist elites; within just a few years those elites played their trump card, followed by all the usual effects. During the actions against the World Economic Forum in February 2002, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the direct action groups were effectively abandoned by all their existing allies, from labor unions to NGOs. They carried out the action anyway—though they weren't really able to pull off more than a march—in the face of massive repression. The repression, in turn, grew worse and worse. By the time of the FTAA meetings in Miami, the government felt it could unleash an order of brutality—the extensive use of tasers, sweeping activists illegally off the streets and subjecting them to systematic torture—that they clearly hadn't felt they could get away with before the war. At the same time, similar things are happening overseas, even in countries largely outside the bounds of the "war on terror."

Still, there's every reason to assume this project will not prove viable. History still appears to be operating in rapid motion. Public support for the conflict in Iraq waned much faster than support for any comparable land war in the last century; the US simply doesn't have the economic resources to maintain the new imperial project; already we're seeing much of Latin America increasingly radicalized as the US was too tied down to meaningfully intervene.

I think some of the points raised earlier about the rules of engagement, and the difference between armies and police, might be useful in trying to understand this—now, perhaps, mercifully passing—peculiar historical moment, of the so-called "war on terror." What the United States has been attempting to impose on the world in its name is not really a war at all. It is of course a truism that, as nuclear weapons proliferate, declared wars between states no longer occur, and all conflicts come to be framed as "police actions" of one sort or another. But it is also critical to bear in mind that police always see themselves as engaged in a war largely without rules, against an opponent without honor, towards whom one is not, therefore, obliged to act honorably, and that ultimately cannot be won. States always tend to define their relation to their people in terms of some kind of unwinnable war, and the American state has been one of the most flagrant in this regard. In recent decades we have seen a War on Poverty degenerate into a War on Crime, then a War on Drugs (the first to be extended internationally), and finally now a War on Terror. As this sequence makes clear, the latter is not really a war at all, but an attempt to extend this same, internal logic to the entire globe. It is an attempt to declare a diffuse global police state. Not one on the model of a nation-state, certainly—but neither, I suspect, along the lines of Hardt and Negri's (2000) centerless humanitarian Empire (that's more a European project at the moment, though of course open for revival). Nation-states, after all, were always something of an historical anomaly, if not an impossible ideal. Almost the moment an attempt was made to extend the logic of the nation-state to the entire world, to cover the entire planet with a grid of independent, sovereign nation-states, the whole project began to fall apart. Bush's project looked more like an imperial state in a much older sense, something like Rome in its final days: universal, predatory, sporadic but overwhelming in its use of violence, a state to which everyone had to claim allegiance, even Goths and Huns, at the same time as they were plotting to destroy it. However it works out though, in the final analysis it was ultimately created far more in reaction to the success of our diffuse global uprising than to the threat of Osama bin Ladin—even if the latter certainly provided the ultimate convenient excuse. It was just that, on a global scale as well, moral-political struggle had created rules of engagement that make it very difficult for the US to strike out directly at those it would most like to strike out against.[10]

If one were to put it in the terms suggested in the last section, one might say (glibly no doubt) that just as the structure of violence most appropriate for a political ontology based in the imagination is revolution, so the structure of imagination most appropriate for a political ontology based in violence is, precisely, terror. One could add that the Bushes and Bin Ladens are working quite in tandem in this regard. (It is significant, I think, that if Al Qaeda does harbor some gigantic utopian vision—a recreation of the old Islamic Indian Ocean diaspora? a restoration of the caliphate? mass conversion?—they haven't told us much about it yet.) Still, this is a bit simplistic. To understand the American regime as a global structure, and at the same time to understand its contradictions, I suspect one would have to return to the cosmological role of the police in American culture. It is a peculiar characteristic of life in the United States that most American citizens, who over the course of the day try to avoid any possibility of having to deal with police or police affairs, can normally be expected to go home and spend hours watching dramas that invite them to see the world from a policeman's point of view. Over the course of the 1960s, police abruptly took the place once held by cowboys in American entertainment.[11] And, by now, these images of American police are being relentlessly exported to every corner of the world, alongside their flesh-and-blood equivalents. What I would emphasize here, though, is that both are characterized by an extra-legal impunity that, paradoxically, makes them able to embody a kind of constituent power turned against itself. The Hollywood cop, like the cowboy, is a lone maverick who breaks all the rules (which is permissible, even necessary, since he is always dealing with dishonorable opponents). In fact, it is generally the cop who engages in the endless property destruction that, as I've noted, provide so much of the pleasure of Hollywood action films. In other words, police are the heroes in part because they are the only figures who can systematically ignore the law. It is constituent power turned on itself because cops, on screen or in reality, are never trying to create anything. They are simply maintaining the status quo. In a sense, this is the most clever ideological displacement of all, the perfect complement to the aforementioned privatization of (consumer) desire, against which the puppets stand in festive protest. Insofar as the popular festival endures, it has become pure Spectacle, as the Situationists would say—with the role of Master of the Potlatch granted to the very figures who, in real life, are in charge of ensuring that any actual outbreaks of popular festive behavior are violently suppressed.

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[10] The fact that almost all the principle figures involved in the repression of protest in America ended up as "security consultants" in Baghdad after the American conquest of Iraq seems rather telling here. Of course, they rapidly discovered their usual tactics were not particularly effective against opponents who really *were* violent—capable, for example, of dealing with IMF and World Bank officials by actually blowing them up.

Like any ideological formula, however, this one is extraordinarily unstable, riddled with contradictions—as the initial difficulties of the US police in suppressing the globalization movement so vividly attest. It seems to me more a way of managing a situation of extreme alienation and insecurity that itself can only be maintained by systematic coercion. Faced with anything that remotely resembles creative, non-alienated, experience, it tends to look as ridiculous as a deodorant commercial during a time of national disaster. The anarchist problem remains how to bring that sort of experience, and the imaginative power that lies behind it, into the daily lives of those outside the small autonomous bubbles they have already been able to create. This is a continual problem. There's no way to be sure it's even possible. But there seems every reason to believe that, were it possible, the power of the police cosmology, and with it, the power of the police themselves, would simply melt away.

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[11] Very abruptly: it's almost impossible to find a single American movie from before the 1960s in which the hero was a police officer. The timing of the switch seems significant.

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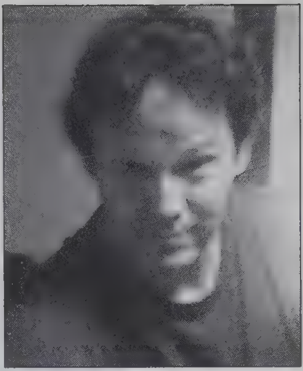

David Graeber is an anthropologist, trained at the University of Chicago. He spent two years carrying out ethnographic research in highland Madagascar, and was an assistant professor at Yale when he first became involved in the global justice movement in 2000 (with somewhat unfortunate career consequences)—and has remained active in a variety of activist projects ranging from People's Global Action to the Industrial Workers of the World. He is the author of *Lost People: Magic and the Legacy of Slavery in Madagascar*, *Towards an Anthropological Theory of Value*, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, and *Possibilities*. He is currently a Reader in Social Anthropology at Goldsmiths, University of London, where he is at work on a project on the history of debt.

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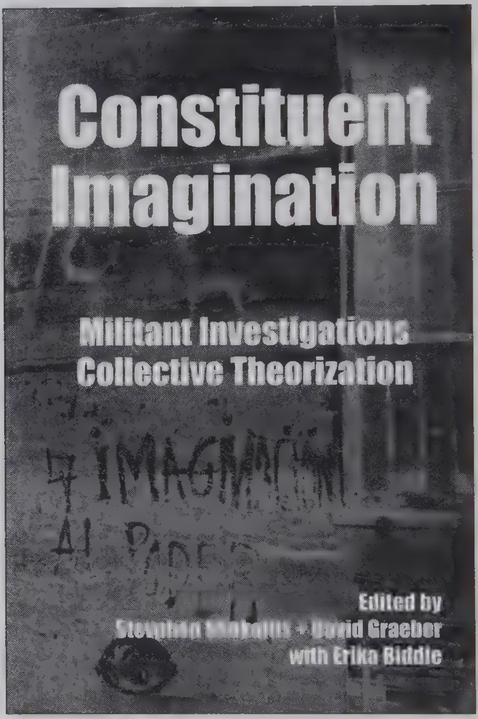
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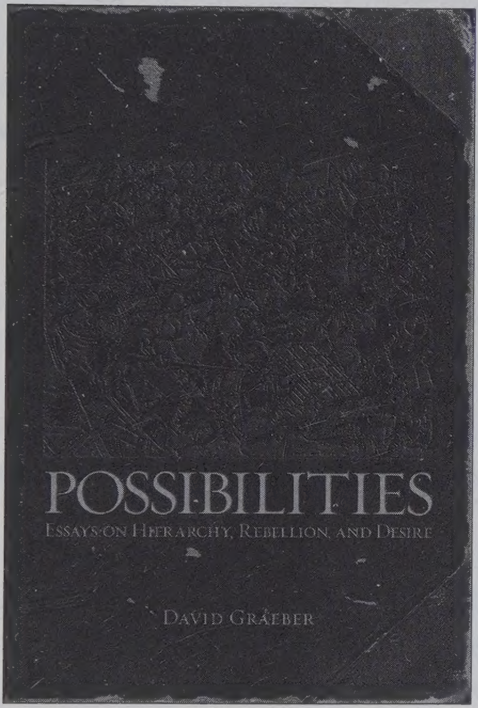

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